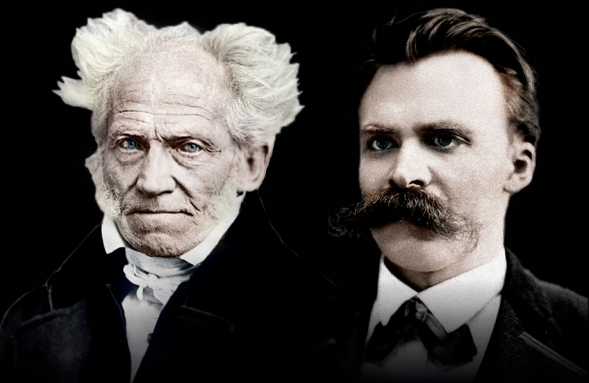


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# Essays on Schopenhauer & Nietzsche

Values and the Will of Life



Christopher Janaway

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*Values and the Will of Life*

CHRISTOPHER JANAWAY

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# Preface

This volume brings together a selection of my writings on the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche from the years 2010 to 2021. The pieces were written for presentation separately, in some cases for less specialized audiences, with the result that they sometimes crisscross the same territory from different directions. I hope the reader will find that the pieces taken together have a satisfying unity, and perhaps give a more rounded view of the central topics. Two thinkers are conjoined here, because I find that the issues over which Nietzsche had to come to terms with Schopenhauer—the death of God, the meaning of existence, suffering, compassion, the will, Christian values, the affirmation or negation of life—are both the central and most rewarding aspects of Nietzsche and the site of Schopenhauer’s most potent intervention in the history of philosophy. I like to think that I am not doctrinaire about method, and it strikes me in retrospect that in these essays I have been working within a space bounded by philosophy and philology. My earliest training was as a classicist, and I later became something of a Germanist. From these disciplines I retain a strong sense of the care required when confronting texts from an earlier time in what is for me another language. Hence, though I quote from translations of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, I provide references to the German texts throughout. I acquired other habits from analytic philosophy, principally to prioritize clarity and engage actively with the thoughts the texts present. I strive to do this with some restraint, avoiding the excesses of anachronism and immodesty into which analytic philosophy can stray when it looks at the past, and intervening just enough to bring the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to life.

For Schopenhauer the human world was precarious: ‘A very moderate increase in temperature would dry up all rivers and springs’ and ‘nine-tenths of the human race lives in a constant struggle with want, always on the verge of destruction and keeping themselves there only with trouble and effort.’ I am conscious of writing from a position of relative security, and I thank family, friends, and colleagues for the contacts we have been able to maintain during the restrictions and lockdowns of the last two years, and above all my wife, the philosopher Christine Lopes, for all her support and for suggesting the subtitle for the volume.

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- ‘Affect and Cognition in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche’, in Alix Cohen and Robert Stern (eds.), *Thinking about the Emotions: A Philosophical History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 206–22.
- ‘Beauty is False, Truth Ugly: Nietzsche on Art and Life’, in Daniel Came (ed.), *Nietzsche on Art and Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 39–56.
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- ‘Nietzsche on Morality, Drives, and Human Greatness’, in Christopher Janaway and Simon Robertson (eds.), *Nietzsche, Naturalism and Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 183–201.
- ‘Who—or What—Says Yes to Life?’, in Daniel Came (ed.), *Nietzsche on Morality and the Affirmation of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 154–69.

Minor changes have been made to harmonize section headings and referencing. My quotations from Schopenhauer’s published writings are now universally from translations in the Cambridge Edition of Schopenhauer’s Works, replacing equivalent passages from the Payne translations that appeared in some of the pieces on first publication.

# Abbreviations and References

## Works by Schopenhauer

### *German texts*

- GB        *Gesammelte Briefe*. Ed. Arthur Hübscher. Bonn: Bouvier, 1978.  
HN        *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß*. Ed. Arthur Hübscher. Frankfurt am Main: Kramer, 1970.  
SW        *Sämtliche Werke*. Ed. Arthur Hübscher. Mannheim: F. A. Brockhaus, 1988.  
WWR<sub>1818</sub> *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* [1st edition]. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1819 [1818].

Citations to SW and HN give volume number, followed by page number.

### *Works in translation*

- BM        *Prize Essay on the Basis of Morals*  
FR        *On the Fourfold root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*  
FW        *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will*  
MR        *Manuscript Remains*  
PP        *Parerga and Paralipomena*  
WN        *On Will in Nature*  
WWR      *The World as Will and Representation*

Citations to MR give volume number, followed by page number, of the translation by E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Berg, 1988). All other citations are to volumes in the Cambridge Edition of the works of Schopenhauer, giving page numbers (preceded by volume numbers in the case of PP and WWR).

## Works by Nietzsche

### *German texts*

- KSA        *Kritische Studienausgabe*. Ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988.  
KSB        *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe*. Ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986.

Citations to KSA and KSB give volume number, followed by page number.

### *Works in translation*

- A        *The Anti-Christ*  
BGE      *Beyond Good and Evil*  
BT       *The Birth of Tragedy*

CW	<i>The Case of Wagner</i>
D	<i>Daybreak</i>
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i>
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i>
HH	<i>Human, All Too Human</i>
TI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i>
UM	<i>Untimely Meditations</i>
WLN	<i>Writings from the Late Notebooks</i>
WP	<i>The Will to Power</i>
Z	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>

Citations to the translations of Nietzsche's works give *section* numbers, unless otherwise stated. For details of the translations used, see Bibliography.

# Introduction

There are many possible approaches to the study of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Both philosophers responded to many influences, influenced many later writers, and can be compared in interesting ways with diverse schools of thought from before their time and after. Foregrounding the connection between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche privileges a particular kind of narrative over others. If Nietzsche had never existed or had never read *The World as Will and Representation*, we might well view Schopenhauer somewhat differently than we do now. Nobody should think that Schopenhauer is of interest only because he served up doctrines that Nietzsche could first take to heart and then reject, nor that this act of rejection, prominent though it is, is the summation of Nietzsche's achievement. However, when we focus upon the aspects of Nietzsche that react to Schopenhauer, we also light up aspects of Schopenhauer that were apt to provoke such a reaction, and I believe we see more clearly some of the issues that matter most to both of them.

For both philosophers, God is dead. Nietzsche gave Schopenhauer credit for being the 'first admitted and uncompromising atheist' among German philosophers (GS, 357/KSA 3: 599). They both believed that as a consequence the world must be seen to lack the meaning Christianity had assigned to it. Europe then enters a new era, faced with a new question:

Looking at nature as if it were proof of the goodness and care of a god; interpreting history in honour of some divine reason, as a continual testimony of a moral world order and ultimate moral purposes; interpreting one's own experiences . . . as if everything were providential, a hint, designed and ordained for the sake of salvation of the soul—that is *over* now . . . As we thus reject the Christian interpretation and condemn its 'meaning' as counterfeit, *Schopenhauer's* question immediately comes at us in a terrible way: *Does existence have any meaning at all?* (GS, 357/KSA 3: 599–601)

Nietzsche wrote these words in 1887, when he had long abandoned his youthful enthusiasm for Schopenhauer's philosophy. Now thoroughly opposed to Schopenhauer, he still portrays him as having singular significance

for European culture ('he *posed* the question—as a good European', GS, 357/KSA 3: 599–601), and for his own development, saying in the same year 'I had to struggle almost solely with my great teacher Schopenhauer' (GM, Preface, 5/KSA 5: 251–2). So if we elect to view Nietzsche from the perspective of Schopenhauer, we are following clear signals from Nietzsche himself. He found in Schopenhauer the predicament he needed to confront.

For Schopenhauer, we are rooted in a nature that is neither good nor caring towards us. The individual human being perseveres in living and has an urge to bring further individuals into life, but does not really know why. Schopenhauer's explanation for this is that each individual is a manifestation of something larger, an underlying drive common to all, which constitutes their inner essence but is outside of their control. This he calls will to life (*Wille zum Leben*). But this will to life brings us no good. It traps us in self-centred desire, a wrong identification of our true self with the human individual, an egoistic conception of the good, conflict with other beings, and an existence pervaded by suffering. Opposed to the will to life stands everything of real value: art, morality, and the kind of redemption from suffering that mystics from several of the world's religions have recognized in past ages. He advocates a selfless moral compassion for the world's sufferings, but argues that the only solution to our existence, upon which Christianity, Buddhism, and Brahmanism all converge, is a retreat into complete selflessness through a cessation of willing and transcendence of individuality. This blissful release can be attained once the will to life *negates* itself.

Nietzsche rebels against all of this. For him, morality is a questionable phenomenon and egoism is wrongly maligned; suffering is an enhancement of life, and the attempt to eliminate it is impoverishing; art is full, not drained, of willing; the world religions and the whole idea of being saved from our life are symptoms of a malaise from which modern culture has somehow to recover. In Schopenhauerian self-negation he detects 'the beginning of the end, the standstill, the backward-glancing tiredness, the will turning *against* life, the last sickness gently and melancholically announcing itself' (GM, Preface: 5/KSA 5: 252). We need instead a way of affirming or saying Yes to what is natural in us. As part of his resistance to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche rejects the central notion of will to life. He wrote in a notebook, 'Will to life? I always found in its place only will to power' (KSA 10: 187). But in a subtle twist of Schopenhauer's notion he refers to will to power as a 'life-will' (*Lebenswille*) that belongs to everything living: 'the great and small struggle revolves everywhere around preponderance, around growth and expansion, around power, in accordance with the will to power, which is simply the will of

life [*der Wille des Lebens*]' (GS, 349/KSA 2: 585–6).<sup>1</sup> This suggests that for Nietzsche there is still some kind of striving that attaches to life itself. In these terms, Nietzsche's hope is that those who are able to see beyond the presuppositions of religion and the morality of compassion will be able to realign themselves with life's natural tendency, not merely to perpetuate itself, but to grow and affirm itself.

Some of the essays in this volume deal with different aspects of Schopenhauer's concept of *will*, the mainstay of his whole philosophy. I shall make a few brief comments about this concept by way of orientation. First, Schopenhauer often treats the concepts *will* and *will to life* as interchangeable. But in practice *will* is a wider and more varied notion. As is well known, Schopenhauer says that the thing in itself is will. That is, he says that the metaphysical reality beyond space, time, causality, and individuation, whose nature Immanuel Kant had, in Schopenhauer's words,<sup>2</sup> 'despaired' of ever knowing, is will. But how secure is this central claim? Can we know the nature of the thing in itself, and is will the thing in itself after all? In a much-cited passage in the 1844 second edition of *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer raises the question 'What is this will ultimately in itself?' or 'What is it quite apart from the fact that it presents itself, or in general *appears*... as *will*?' and says that '[t]his question is *never* to be answered because... being-cognized inherently contradicts being-in-itself and everything we cognize is as such mere appearance'. Thus 'the thing in itself (which we cognize most directly in willing) may have... determinations, properties, and ways of being that entirely elude our grasp or cognition, but which would remain as the essence of the thing in itself even when... it has freely annulled itself as *will*' (WWR 2, 209/SW 3: 221–2). This passage suggests that Schopenhauer's ubiquitous statement 'the will is the thing in itself' should not be taken literally, or at least not univocally, views with which recent commentators have concurred.<sup>3</sup> Much here is debatable. It may be that the thing in itself is will in one sense, but not in another; it may be that Schopenhauer is caught in a tension between two positions here, or that his thinking changes over time much more than he acknowledges. However, the essays in this volume for the most part leave unresolved the large metaphysical and epistemological issues that surround Schopenhauer's notion of the thing in itself, and emphasize

<sup>1</sup> Amended from the Cambridge translation, whose inaccurate phrase 'will to life' threatens to make Nietzsche's position a throwback to Schopenhauer's. For other uses of *Wille des Lebens*, see BGE, 259/KSA 5: 208, and GM, Preface, 3/KSA 5: 250.

<sup>2</sup> See WWR 1, 455/SW 3: 507.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Atwell 1995: 106–28; Cartwright 2001; De Cian and Segala 2002; Shapshay 2008.

instead the especially rich psychological and ethical aspects of the will as it appears in human life.

It might be tempting to say that my focus is more on the will than on the Will, if we adopt the common practice of ‘distinguishing typographically, in the service... of greater philosophical clarity, between the individual, phenomenal or empirical will and Will as thing in itself’ (Jacquette 2007: 104). But I resist this distinction, for two reasons. One is that the dichotomy is an artefact of English-language commentary, and not in Schopenhauer’s texts. Given German orthography, which demands a capital for every noun, he can write only *Wille* every time he uses the word. Philosophical clarity is also perhaps not so easily achieved, because Schopenhauer arguably does not use *Wille* only in the two ways identified above. For example, he often talks of ‘my will’ or (for any arbitrary individual) ‘his will’, where we are seemingly to think of something that is individual, pertaining uniquely to one human being, yet at the same time not empirical. For example, ‘everyone cognizes his will only in the succession of its individual acts, not in and for itself, as a whole: thus nobody is acquainted with his character a priori, but only gets to know it empirically’ (WWR 2, 208/SW 3: 221). If ‘his will’ is a character peculiar to the individual, it cannot easily be identified with ‘[t]he will as thing in itself [which] is whole and undivided in every being’ (WWR 2, 338/SW 3: 371). So ‘his will’ or ‘my will’ is not ‘the Will’; but on the other hand it is hard to equate it simply with anything purely empirical. So rather than forcing every use of *Wille* into one camp or the other, my policy is simply to parallel Schopenhauer’s undifferentiated usage.

In the essays on the Schopenhauerian will, then, we are chiefly concerned with the many facets of the will’s manifestation in the life of the individual human being. These include deliberate willed actions and the question whether they are free, the naturalness of egoistic desires and the possibility of willing the well-being of others, an individual mind’s unconscious wishes and emotions, the human drive to reproduction, the relation of desire to suffering, the relative values of satisfying desires as opposed to not having them, the impact of affects and passions on our capacity for objective cognition, and the possibility of a cognition purged of all affect and of a conscious subject existing in a state of will-lessness.

For the most part, these aspects of the will that give our lives their distinctive and often unsettling character can be appreciated without resolving questions about the nature or knowability of the thing in itself—though one exception arises in Chapter 5, where I argue that Schopenhauer’s talk of transcending individuality and being blissfully absorbed into an ultimately real Oneness

makes sense only if that Oneness is not the will. As for Nietzsche, he never takes seriously the thesis that the thing in itself is will and is sceptical of the very notion 'thing in itself'. But he engages strongly with aspects of the life of willing individuals such as those mentioned above.

\* \* \* \* \*

The emphasis in the present collection of essays is balanced fairly evenly between the two philosophers. Although all the essays were written separately, I have grouped them by theme into four parts. As a rough guide, Parts I and II are on Schopenhauer, with little or no direct intrusion from Nietzsche, and Part IV contains explorations of Nietzschean themes with only occasional reference to Schopenhauer. The essays in Part III are more hybrid in character and examine some of Nietzsche's interpretive and critical responses to Schopenhauer more directly. But the reader should find themes that straddle the 'Schopenhauerian' and 'Nietzschean' parts of the volume and provide a degree of unity to the collection.

Chapter 1, 'The Real Essence of Human Beings: Schopenhauer and the Unconscious Will', focuses on the will as a blind striving for existence, life, and reproduction. Human beings, according to Schopenhauer, have the same essence as all other manifestations of will in the world, and this has several consequences for Schopenhauer's conception of humanity. The true core of the personality is not the self-conscious 'I' or subject of knowledge, but rather the will, which is fundamentally blind and without knowledge, but which interacts with the intellect almost as an agent distinct from it. Schopenhauer makes various psychological observations about the interplay of intellect and will. These include the omnipresence of sexual desire in or beneath our experience; the persistence of desires and affects unknown to the self-conscious intellect; the will's capacity to prohibit representations in the intellect that are liable to arouse certain emotions; and the occurrence of madness when memories painful to the will are shielded from the intellect and arbitrary representations are substituted. The chapter also discusses the extent to which these ideas influenced Freud's conception of the unconscious.

In Chapter 2, 'Necessity, Responsibility, and Character: Schopenhauer on Freedom of the Will', we examine the argument of Schopenhauer's essay *On the Freedom of the Human Will*, drawing also on his other works. Schopenhauer argues that an individual human being's acts of will are not free: all human actions are causally necessitated, as are all other events in empirical nature, hence there is no absolute freedom in the sense of the traditional notion of *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*. However, our sense of



responsibility or agency (being the ‘doers of our deeds’) is nonetheless unshakeable. To account for this Schopenhauer invokes the Kantian distinction between empirical and intelligible characters. The essay highlights divergences between Schopenhauer and Kant over the intelligible character, which for Schopenhauer cannot be rational and cannot causally interact with anything. I raise the questions whether the intelligible character may be redundant to Schopenhauer’s position, and whether it can coherently belong to an individual agent, suggesting that for Schopenhauer a more consistent position would have been to deny freedom of will to the individual altogether.

Schopenhauer asserts that ‘the will, which is objectified in human life as it is in every appearance, is a striving without aim and without end’, and Chapter 3, ‘Schopenhauer on the Aimlessness of the Will’, takes its departure from this statement, which I interpret as follows: however many specific aims of my specific desires I manage to attain, none is a final aim, in the sense that none terminates my ‘willing as a whole’, none turns me into a non-willing being. To understand Schopenhauer’s claim we must recognize his central contrast between happiness and will-lessness. Happiness is the satisfaction of individual desire, but no act of will that succeeds in satisfying individual desire is the attainment of a final aim, in that none brings about a conscious state in which the subject experiences no more unfulfilled desires. Such a state is the ultimate goal of existence, in Schopenhauer’s view, but happiness does not provide a route along which it can be attained.

Having established will as what is most real about ourselves, Schopenhauer ends his account in *The World as Will and Representation* by promoting the will’s *negation*. Some commentators have asserted that for Schopenhauer negation of the will is the ‘highest good’. However, as I make clear at the start of Chapter 4, ‘What’s So Good about Negation of the Will? Schopenhauer and the Problem of the *summum bonum*’, Schopenhauer states that there cannot be a highest good or *summum bonum* literally, only figuratively. What is the reason for this ambivalence? Schopenhauer defines good as whatever is conducive to the will, but it appears that, by this criterion, absence of will could not be good, much less the highest good. I suggest that Schopenhauer implicitly recognizes two ways of being good, corresponding to two kinds of willing: ordinary willing, aimed at the well-being of individuals, and a will to be without ordinary individualistic willing. Thus he can hold that negation of the will is the highest good, while also making clear that it is not the highest of the goods attainable by ordinary individualistic willing. However, although his position seems to require the second kind of willing, it remains unclear how his metaphysics can accommodate it.

The pieces in Part II concern variously love, death, and pessimism, on all of which Schopenhauer has distinctive and influential views. In two of these pieces we encounter the early reception of Schopenhauer by figures other than Nietzsche, namely Richard Wagner, Eduard von Hartmann, and the undeservedly neglected chronicler of philosophical pessimism, Olga Plümacher. Von Hartmann's voluminous work *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, first published in 1868, was very much in the philosophical mainstream during Nietzsche's lifetime and went through twelve editions in two decades. Plümacher's book *Der Pessimismus in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (1884 and 1888) represents von Hartmann as the more up-to-date advocate of pessimism, who has completed Schopenhauer's work by removing several of his faults. Nietzsche read Plümacher's book thoroughly and even used excerpts from it, unacknowledged, in his own works of 1887. However, he is dismissive of von Hartmann, to whom he regards Schopenhauer as greatly superior.<sup>4</sup> It is always important to Nietzsche to have a worthy opponent.

Wagner's devotion to the works of Schopenhauer is well known. In the previously unpublished Chapter 5, 'Beyond the Individual: Schopenhauer, Wagner, and the Value of Love', I explore Schopenhauer's treatment of love and Wagner's reaction to it in his presentation of the lovers Tristan and Isolde. Schopenhauer has two contrasting concepts of love: sexual love (*Geschlechtsliebe*) and loving kindness (*Menschenliebe*). He regards the latter as arising out of universal compassion for all beings, which he aligns with the Christian concepts of *agapē* and *caritas*. The erotic kind of love is worthless to the individual, who is deluded by the 'will of the species' that drives the human being to reproduction. By contrast, the selfless, moral kind of love is a step on the path to redemption through extinction of desire and of the individual-self in consciousness. In *Tristan and Isolde* Wagner tried to rectify Schopenhauer's philosophy by making sexual love the route to a redemption that transcends individuality. However, rather than rectifying Schopenhauer's philosophy, Wagner's intervention is quite incompatible with it. Although both kinds of love trade on the idea that individuation is illusory, they must be kept apart from one another: while *Geschlechtsliebe* is part of Schopenhauer's diagnosis of what is wrong with the human condition, *Menschenliebe* belongs to his proposed remedy for that condition.

The illusoriness of the individual also plays a role in Schopenhauer's rather complex attitude to death, which I examine in Chapter 6, 'Schopenhauer's

<sup>4</sup> See GS, 220–1/KSA 3: 601–2.

Consoling View of Death'. Human beings' fear of death is not rational, according to Schopenhauer, because it stems from the non-rational will to life, which is our essence. But we can and should overcome this natural clinging to life. Schopenhauer holds that life consists of suffering, and that it would have been better not to have existed. Death is an opportunity no longer to be the human individual with all his or her troubles. Yet he says that it is a mistake to terminate one's life because of its sufferings. I argue that his view is consistent: suicide may attain a kind of good by ending suffering, but if it occurs through egoistic desire, it prevents the more valuable outcome of redemption through negation of the will. However, while Schopenhauer contends that we should generally welcome death, the nature of the consolation he offers seems *prima facie* difficult to comprehend. He appears to suggest that death can be welcomed as an annihilation, which is no more to be feared than our non-existence before birth. However, he in fact claims that something about us is not destroyed when we die. Appealing to analogous views in Indian philosophy, Schopenhauer regards individuation as illusory, and consoles us with the thought that the underlying will, which he describes as the true self, persists when the individual dies.

Chapter 7, 'Worse than the Best Possible Pessimism? Olga Plümacher's Critique of Schopenhauer', begins with Plümacher's characterization of philosophical pessimism as comprising two propositions: 'The sum of displeasure outweighs the sum of pleasure' and 'Consequently the non-being of the world would be better than its being.' She cites Schopenhauer as the first proponent of this position, and Eduard von Hartmann as the thinker who has developed it to its fullest potential. She heavily criticizes Schopenhauer in many respects, not for being a pessimist, but rather for not achieving as good a pessimism as he might have done, on the following major grounds: that his account of pleasure as merely privative is implausible, that he has a confused account of individuation, that his retention of a Christian notion of guilt is gratuitous, that he lapses into the self-pitying subjectivity of the condition she calls *Weltschmerz*, and that his philosophy leads to quietism, and is thus inferior to von Hartmann's combination of pessimism and optimism, which allows for social progress. Although Plümacher's advocacy of von Hartmann's rather implausible position is unconvincing, her critique of Schopenhauer is penetrating and prefigures some later commentaries.

The chapters in Part III set Nietzsche more directly in debate with Schopenhauer's philosophy. In Chapter 8, 'Schopenhauer's Christian Perspectives', I take my lead from Nietzsche's remarks about Schopenhauer in *The Gay Science*, section 357. I argue that Nietzsche is right about what

Schopenhauer claims to do, that is to say, to defend values from a distinctly Christian ‘ascetic moral perspective’ while ‘dismissing faith in God’. My governing aims are: (1) to establish that Schopenhauer is genuinely an atheist; (2) to understand the nature of the Christian values—those of selfless compassion and ascetic release from the world—that he nonetheless espouses; (3) to assess Schopenhauer’s claim that Christianity represents truths allegorically; and (4) to examine the coherence or plausibility of his position. Merely continuing Christian values is not the same as being ‘stuck’ in them (a phrase Nietzsche had borrowed from Plümacher). Nietzsche’s claim is that Christian values ought not to survive the death of God and, having supported Nietzsche’s description of Schopenhauer, I end by addressing the question whether he is also right in this evaluation.

Many commentators have said that Nietzsche is concerned, either in all or in some parts of his career, with providing a kind of ‘theodicy’, or with justifying or finding meaning in suffering. Chapter 9, ‘On the Very Idea of “Justifying Suffering”’ examines these notions, questioning whether terms such as ‘theodicy’ or ‘justifying suffering’ are helpful in getting Nietzsche’s views into focus, and exploring some unclarities concerning the way in which such terms themselves are understood. The article discusses the notion of ‘aesthetic justification’ in *The Birth of Tragedy*, arguing that here ‘justification’ is used in the very loose sense of ‘enabling a positive attitude towards’. I then examine Nietzsche’s retrospective ‘Attempt at a Self-Criticism’ and argue that here Nietzsche does not endorse his earlier notion of aesthetic justification, but rather praises *The Birth of Tragedy* for its refusal to find a moral meaning in existence. This negative virtue is presented in explicit contrast to Schopenhauer’s claim that the world has a moral meaning that metaphysics can discover. Schopenhauer rejects the optimistic moral meaning provided by theism, but replaces it with a pessimistic meaning: the world is in itself such that its non-existence would have been better. This shows that there can be meaning in existence that does not correlate with affirmation. The later Nietzsche rejects the ‘metaphysical need’ along with theism, and reaches a position in which neither metaphysical optimism nor metaphysical pessimism is viable. I conclude that, while Nietzsche’s later position is continuous with the tradition of theodicy in seeking to relate suffering’s value to some wider whole, it is also discontinuous with that tradition because it does not hold that suffering as such has a fixed normative value, that suffering as such has a meaning, that it happens for a reason, or that it is justified, let alone that the world’s containing suffering is in line with our interests, or that we ought because of suffering to value our lives one way or another.

Chapter 10, 'Affect and Cognition in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche', is based around a clear contrast of views: Schopenhauer holds that affects and emotions impair cognition, while Nietzsche apparently replies that they are ineliminable from cognition, and that they enhance it. For Schopenhauer, human cognition is normally in the service of affective states that he classes as 'movements of the will'. But he sees cognition as spoiled, warped, or tainted by its inability to shake off the emotions, desires, or drives that belong to human nature. The exception is a rare kind of cognition in which an individual becomes the 'pure subject of cognition'. Nietzsche accepts something analogous to Schopenhauer's descriptive position on the relation between cognition and the affects. But he firmly rejects Schopenhauer's evaluative stance, and denies the possibility of a pure, objective, affect-free cognition. Nietzsche argues that the influence of the affects on human cognition is not only necessary, but beneficial. This, the chapter argues, is at the heart of Nietzsche's famous 'perspectivism'. I consider and reply to some objections that have been made to an earlier presentation of my reading of the perspectivism passage in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (GM III:12/KSA 5: 363–5).

The four pieces in Part IV are discussions of Nietzsche's views in their own right, mentioning Schopenhauer less frequently, and in some cases not at all. Yet Schopenhauer still hovers in the background, for we find Nietzsche concerned with the question whether suffering is an objection to life, with pessimism, and with our capacity to affirm life rather than negate it. Chapter 11, 'Beauty is False, Truth Ugly: Nietzsche on Art and Life' looks at the role Nietzsche assigns to art in the context of these issues. There are passages in Nietzsche's corpus which suggest that he thinks the evaluative attitudes to life that may be derived from art are simply a matter of illusion, falsification, and deception. This chapter argues that Nietzsche's construal of the relation of art to truth is always more subtle than that simple impression would have it. In *The Birth of Tragedy* three different relations of art to truth are juxtaposed: the Apollonian, the tragic, and the Socratic. In later works, especially *The Gay Science*, there is much to suggest that art is necessary as the provider of illusions that make life bearable. Yet at the same time, the chapter contends, Nietzsche promotes the 'intellectual conscience' which entails a commitment to affirmation of life 'as it is'. The chapter considers ways in which this tension might be resolved, but argues that the relation between art and truth continues to be unstable for Nietzsche.

Chapter 12, 'Attitudes to Suffering: Parfit and Nietzsche' elucidates Nietzsche's claim that suffering is not bad in itself, coming at the issue by addressing the objection that no one, including Nietzsche, believes that claim.

In *On What Matters*, Derek Parfit argues that Nietzsche does not disagree with central normative beliefs that ‘we’ hold. Such disagreement would threaten Parfit’s claim that normative beliefs are known by intuition. However, Nietzsche defends a conception of well-being that challenges Parfit’s normative claim that suffering is bad in itself for the sufferer. Nietzsche recognizes the phenomenon of ‘growth through suffering’ as essential to well-being. Hence, removal of all suffering would lead to diminished well-being. Parfit claims that if Nietzsche understood normative concepts in Parfit’s objectivist sense, he would not disagree with the claim that suffering is bad in itself—that intrinsic facts about suffering count in favour of our not wanting it. I argue that Nietzsche would disagree. Suffering for Nietzsche is not merely instrumentally necessary for psychological growth, nor is it easy to construe it as something bad in itself that contributes value as part of a good whole. Suffering that can be given meaning through growth is something we have reason to want. Suffering that remains brute and uninterpreted is something we have reason not to want. But for Nietzsche, suffering as such has no invariant value across all contexts.

Nietzsche presents as an ideal the ability to affirm oneself, or one’s life, as a whole, without wanting anything to be different, an ability that could be tested by entertaining the thought of ‘eternal recurrence’. To be capable of such self-affirmation would be the most valuable state for a human being; but only certain rare individuals would have reason to want to be in such a state. On the other hand, Nietzsche sometimes talks of greatness in terms of properties of, and relations between, a human being’s drives or instincts: the ‘highest’ human being would have strong drives, a multiplicity of drives, and internal opposition between drives that were harnessed into a unity. Chapter 13, ‘Nietzsche on Morality, Drives, and Human Greatness’, seeks an analysis of this notion of greatness. As to what brings about or constitutes the *unity* among drives that is requisite for greatness, Nietzsche appears to vacillate: sometimes it is a matter of chance, at other times it seems to be a task whose achievement involves conscious agency of a kind that some naturalist readings wish to deny. A central question for the essay is how the ideal of self-affirmation and the ideal of greatness as an internal constitution of the drives relate to one another. I argue that Nietzschean drives and instincts are dispositions of a certain kind that are not fully within the agent’s rational control. However, they are mutable for Nietzsche and are subject to alteration by cultural environments. Drives or instincts may be strengthened, weakened, or even die out given the degree of nourishment they receive from their environment. Hence instincts such as those of ‘self-denial’ and ‘self-sacrifice’ that Nietzsche links with

morality, may be culturally acquired. Moral beliefs and other consciously held moral attitudes must be seen as effects of states of the drives, but also as causally influencing the states of the drives, since Nietzsche regards morality as both a symptom of decline in human flourishing and a danger to it. The converse of this is that an attitude of self-affirmation can function both as a symptom of the state of the drives characteristic of greatness, and as a promoter of that state.

Similar issues are at stake in Chapter 14, ‘Who—or What—says Yes to Life?’, which examines attitudes or processes that Nietzsche describes as ‘affirmation’ or ‘Yes-saying’ (*Bejahung*, *Jasagen*). Nietzsche often speaks of something other than an individual as the locus of affirmation. Surveying Nietzsche’s uses from the period of *Daybreak* onwards, we find *Bejahung*, *Jasagen* and cognates with a variety of grammatical subjects, referring to human individuals, cultural products, and practices such as art forms and value-systems, and subpersonal items such as instincts and drives. This raises the question how he conceives the attitude or process of ‘Yes-saying’. Taking a distinction made by Ken Gemes, between ‘naïve affirmation’ and ‘reflective affirmation’, the article argues that Nietzsche gives priority to affirmation that is the direct expression of instincts or drives in action. However, many drives or instincts are culturally acquired, for Nietzsche. Dispositions to action, feeling, and thought can become drives or instincts through cultural transmission, and operate outside conscious control to influence culture in turn. The notion that a drive ‘in us’ says Yes to life and the notion that a surrounding culture says Yes to life do not conflict but are two sides of the same coin. The essay ends with the reflection that Nietzsche himself must fail to embody the highest affirmative ideal because, unlike the fictional Zarathustra, he inhabits a culture that has moulded his drives in ways that impede affirmation.

PART I

SCHOPENHAUER ON THE WILL



# 1

## The Real Essence of Human Beings

### Schopenhauer and the Unconscious Will

#### 1. Introduction

In *The World as Will and Representation* (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, 1819 and 1844) Arthur Schopenhauer aims at a global metaphysics, a theory of the essence of the world as it is in itself. He calls this essence *will* (*Wille*), which, to put it briefly, he understands as a blind striving for existence, life, and reproduction. Human beings have the same essence as all other manifestations of will in the world, and this has several consequences for Schopenhauer's conception of humanity. Neither rationality, nor intentional action, nor consciousness is primary or foundational in human beings. The true core of the personality is not the self-conscious 'I' or subject of knowledge, but rather the will, which is fundamentally blind and without knowledge, but which interacts with the intellect almost as an agent distinct from it. As we shall see, Schopenhauer makes a number of psychological observations about the interplay of intellect and will. These include the omnipresence of sexual desire in or beneath our experience; the persistence of desires and affects unknown to the self-conscious intellect; the will's capacity to prohibit representations in the intellect that are liable to arouse certain emotions; and the occurrence of madness when memories painful to the will are shielded from the intellect and arbitrary representations are substituted. In this paper I propose to elucidate and interrogate Schopenhauer's notion of will and its relation to ideas about the unconscious, with the aim of addressing its significance as an exercise in philosophical psychology.

#### 2. Schopenhauer in the History of the Unconscious

This paper will be more exegetical than historical in any comparative or genealogical sense. Schopenhauer rather encourages an ahistorical appreciation of his work. He tends to say that all previous thinkers have failed to solve

that ‘riddle of the world’ which he answers by saying that the world is will; and that all previous thinkers have failed to see will as having primacy in human beings, instead making willing secondary to knowing, or to something called reason, soul, or intellect. He infamously portrays most of what has happened in philosophy since the publication of Kant’s *Critiques* as dishonest, worthless, and irrelevant—though we should not always take this at face value. Schopenhauer is much less of a Kantian than he implies; he is without doubt more of his immediate time than his rantings against the German idealists and university professors of the day would have us believe; and he is extremely well read, constantly citing a wide range of historical and contemporary authors in philosophy, literature, and the sciences.

In the case of Goethe, Schopenhauer knew him personally in the decade 1810–20 through his mother’s literary set in Weimar. He quotes Goethe’s verse liberally in *The World as Will and Representation*, but more to the point in an offhand remark he does acknowledge some continuity between Goethe and his own central doctrine of the will. He says of Goethe’s novel *The Elective Affinities* (*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, 1809) that: ‘[a]s the title already suggests, [it] is based on the idea (although perhaps even unbeknown to Goethe) that the will, the ground of our own essence, is the same thing that announces itself in the lowest inorganic appearances.’<sup>1</sup>

Schopenhauer’s surviving notebooks attest that he had spent some time studying Schelling’s works of the early 1800s, including the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (*System des Transzendentalen Idealismus*, 1800).<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested that Schopenhauer appropriates some of Schelling’s central notions: Andrew Bowie has written that ‘Schopenhauer avoids the term “the absolute”, but his notion of the Will has the same function as the absolute in the structure of [his] argument’,<sup>3</sup> and that Schopenhauer’s position ‘echoes what is intended by [Schelling’s] notion of “intellectual intuition”’—this despite the fact that Schopenhauer not only avoids, but on numerous occasions elaborately deplores, the whole notion of ‘intellectual intuition’, and is generally quite rude about Schelling. Sebastian Gardner has recently questioned the extent to which Schopenhauer’s theory of will parallels anything in Schelling, on the grounds that Schopenhauer’s philosophy is not genuinely a form of transcendental philosophy, and in particular is not concerned to offer an account of the world from within the conditions of self-consciousness,

<sup>1</sup> WWR 2, 309/SW 3: 338. Schopenhauer goes on to comment that the spirit of Goethe’s approach to the natural sciences coincided with his own theorizing, although he (i.e. Schopenhauer) was not conscious of this influence. See WWR 2, 310/SW 3: 338.

<sup>2</sup> See MR 2, 339–91/HN 2, 304–40.

<sup>3</sup> Bowie 2003: 263.

instead propounding a form of naturalism underlain by what is ultimately a fully realist metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> To debate this issue further would take us too far afield for present purposes—which is not to deny that it is a worthwhile and promising debate to pursue.

If we look for influences forward in time, Schopenhauer is well established as a staple in the history of the unconscious.<sup>5</sup> In their different ways Eduard von Hartmann and Friedrich Nietzsche are indebted to Schopenhauer in an explicit and thematic manner. Both Freud and Jung were also very much aware of his work, though the nature and medium of Schopenhauer's influence on the development of psychoanalysis is often seen as less clear cut. There is a body of literature on the Schopenhauer–Freud connection (effectively reviewed by Gardner in the piece mentioned above),<sup>6</sup> which reveals that Schopenhauer's anticipations of Freud are indeed remarkable—something the latter famously but guardedly acknowledged, saying, for example in 1916–17, that 'There are famous philosophers who may be cited as forerunners—above all the great thinker Schopenhauer, whose unconscious "will" is equivalent to the mental instincts of psycho-analysis' (Freud 1917: 143–4). Earlier (in 1905) he had remarked that 'Arthur Schopenhauer, the philosopher, showed mankind the extent to which their activities are determined by sexual impulses—in the ordinary sense of the word' (Freud 1905: 134), and (in 1914) that 'what [Schopenhauer] says... about the struggle against accepting a distressing piece of reality coincides with my conception of repression so completely that once again I owe the chance of making a discovery to my not being well read' (Freud 1914: 15). Finally, in his *Autobiographical Study* of 1925 Freud says:

The large extent to which psycho-analysis coincides with the philosophy of Schopenhauer—not only did he assert the dominance of the emotions and the supreme importance of sexuality but he was even aware of the mechanism of repression—is not to be traced to my acquaintance with his teaching. I read Schopenhauer very late in life. (Freud 1925: 59)

One may wish to dig around to show that Freud must have had more direct acquaintance with Schopenhauer's doctrines than he claims here.<sup>7</sup> But even if

<sup>4</sup> Gardner 1999: 391–8.

<sup>5</sup> As mentioned in Whyte 1979; Ellenberger 1970; Henry 1993.

<sup>6</sup> For comments see Gardner 1999; Bischler 1939: 88–97; Cassirer 1946: 31–2; Mann, 1947: 411–28; Proctor-Gregg 1956: 197–214; Assoun, 1976), part II; Gupta 1980: 226–35; Young and Brook 1994: 101–18. See also Magee 1998; Günther Gödde 1999; Zentner 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Additional note. See Atzert 2012, and Brook and Young 2019 for more recent treatments of this theme.

we take Freud's remarks at face value, it is safe to say that Schopenhauer's immense influence on many areas of intellectual and cultural life in the latter half of the nineteenth century provided a seed-bed in which the specific theoretical claims of psychoanalysis could easily grow. In this sense, if in no other, one can proclaim Schopenhauer 'the true philosophical father of psychoanalysis'.<sup>8</sup> However, in the relatively short space remaining here I shall not be pursuing any of these links back or forward, but shall restrict myself to an internal investigation of Schopenhauer's notion of will and what is distinctive about it.

### 3. Awakened Out of Unconsciousness

Let me start with two resounding passages of Schopenhauerian prose, which remain impressive even in translation. Both are from the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, first published in 1844.

Absence of consciousness [*Bewußtlosigkeit*] is the original and natural state of all things, and therefore also the basis from which consciousness is generated in isolated species of beings as their highest efflorescence, so that even so an absence of consciousness is still always the predominant state. Accordingly, most beings have no consciousness: nevertheless they act according to the laws of their nature, i.e. their will. Plants have at most a very weak analogue to consciousness, the lowest animals merely a glimmering of it. But even after it has risen through the entire range of animals to the level of human beings and their faculty of reason, the distinctively botanical lack of consciousness (from which it began) remains the foundation, and traces of it can be seen in the need for sleep as well as in all the great and fundamental imperfections . . . in every intellect that is a product of physiological functions: and we have no concept of any other.

(WWR 2, 151/SW 3: 156)

Awoken to life from the night of unconsciousness (*Bewußtlosigkeit*) the will finds itself as an individual in a world without end or limit, among countless individuals who are all striving, suffering, going astray; and it hurries back to

<sup>8</sup> Gardner 1999: 379. On Jung, I merely comment that the index to his complete works lists around ninety references to Schopenhauer. (Additional note: On Jung's reception of Schopenhauer, see Liebscher 2018. Jung reports his early reception of Schopenhauer in Jung 1963: 69–72; he later identified the Schopenhauerian will with his concept of the Libido [Liebscher 2018: 325].)

the old unconsciousness, as if through a bad dream.—But until then its desires are unlimited, its claims inexhaustible, and every satisfied desire gives birth to a new one. No possible worldly satisfaction could be enough to quiet its longing, give its desires a final goal, and fill the bottomless pit of its heart. . . . Everything in life proclaims that earthly happiness is ordained to be in vain or recognized as an illusion. The basis for this lies deep in the essence of things. (WWR 2, 588/SW 3: 657)

Let me highlight three themes apparent here: first, the continuity of the human essence with that of nature as a whole; next, the secondary and superficial nature of the human intellect, which is in complex interaction with the more fundamental part of us that is the will; and finally, the unhappiness, worthlessness, or nothingness (*Nichtigkeit*) of the life we lead as manifestations of this will, and the consequent need, in Schopenhauer's eyes, for a redemption from this existence.

#### 4. Will as Real Essence

We must be careful with the concept *will*. Schopenhauer asks us not to think of wanting, desiring, or intentionally acting as constitutive of will in his sense, but to stretch the concept much more widely. So we must think away its traditional associations with rationality and consciousness, and indeed with mentality as such. Will has some manifestations that are mental, conscious and rational, some that are mental and conscious but not rational, some that are mental but neither conscious nor rational, and some that are none of these.

Human beings manifest acts of will (*Willensakte*), which are conscious mental states which may well be rational, in that the motives causing someone's actions may be rationally formed beliefs that give them a reason to act. However, Schopenhauer gives a fundamentally anti-dualist account of action, insisting that the act of will is not a purely mental volition that causes physical effects; rather, it is identical with bodily action. So the physical movements I make in the course of intentionally doing something are a case of willing. In fact, Schopenhauer starts his argument for the world as will from this very place. The will in this first sense is immediately known to each subject, in a unique way not captured by the Kantian conception of nature as the realm of objects in space and time and subordinate to causal laws. As the subject of willing, I do not, indeed cannot, understand my body in those objective terms.

There is an immediate and inner knowledge of the self as conjointly subject and body, and this, for Schopenhauer, is the key that unlocks the internal essence (*inneres Wesen*) of all those things distinct from us which present themselves to our outer knowledge as empirical objects. They are all objective manifestations of the same essence, they are all the objectivation or objecthood (*Objektivierung, Objektivität*) of will, or appearance of the will (*Willenserscheinung*).

The initial argument for this is somewhat as follows: I *know* myself and I *am* myself, but in the case of everything else, I can only know it and not *be* it. But if I were to regard other things only to the extent that they are known or knowable, I would be denying them any real being (*Wesen*) at all. They would remain: 'mere representations, i.e. mere phantoms' (*bloße Vorstellung, d.h. bloße Phantome*, (WWR. 1, 128/SW 2: 124)). External things would then be, if you like, mere knowable outsides with no true core within. If we can know our own inner essence directly, we face a choice: either we can regard ourselves as divorced from the rest of the world by virtue of our uniquely having this essence, or we can infer that, as belonging to the world, we must share its essence. A suppressed premise here is that whatever is my essence must be the essence of everything in the world—or of everything that indeed has any essence. So there is a deep-seated naturalism in Schopenhauer's treatment of human beings, which from the start is metaphysical in character; though at the empirical level of description he is amenable to a more scientific naturalism—as we saw in his remark that we have no conception of any form of intellect that is not produced through physiological functions. Schopenhauer also believes that all empirical explanations given in science, though perfectly in order in their own right, must eventually peter out into something inexplicable, and that they need completion by a unifying metaphysical account of the nature of reality as a whole.

Having established the intimate connection of body and will in intentional action, Schopenhauer finds other instances of that connection:

any effect on the body is instantly and immediately an effect on the will as well: it is called pain when it is contrary to the will; and it is called comfort or pleasure when it is in accordance with the will. . . . The identity of body and will is demonstrated in . . . the fact that every violent and excessive movement of the will, i.e. every affect immediately agitates the body and its inner workings and disturbs the course of its vital functions.

(WWR 1, 125–6/SW 2: 120–1)

Schopenhauer embraces as movements of the will:

all desiring, striving, wishing, longing, yearning, hoping, loving, enjoying, rejoicing exulting and the like, no less than not-willing or resisting, and detesting, fleeing, fearing, being angry, hating, grieving, suffering pain, in short all affects and passions...; for these affects and passions are simply movements, more or less weak or strong, now violent and stormy, now gentle and calm, of one's own will that is either restrained or released, satisfied or unsatisfied. (FR, 38/ SW 4: 11)

Though they cannot be classified as *acts* of the will, such affects and passions are (or at least often are) states of mind of which a subject is conscious. What unites them with bodily acts of will is their dynamic nature: they are partially constituted by a condition of desiring or striving in the individual who undergoes them. Schopenhauer is also clear that affects and passions can be present unconsciously:

We can nourish a wish for years without either admitting it to ourselves or even letting it come clearly into consciousness because the intellect is not supposed to find out about it... but if the wish is granted, then we learn from our joy (not without some shame) that it is what we wanted: for instance, the death of some near relative from whom we are to inherit.

(WWR 2, 221/SW 3: 234–5)

Schopenhauer gives many such examples, to which I shall return below when discussing the relation of will to intellect.

From the close association of the above mental states with the body Schopenhauer makes the claim that the body itself, which is the condition of willing in the narrower sense, must also be an objectivation of will. The motives which cause me to act in a certain way do not explain my willing: the foundation of my willing in these particular conscious ways must lie elsewhere than in the causes of my acts of will or of my affects. Schopenhauer concludes that my 'entire body must be nothing other than my will made visible' (WWR 1, 132/SW 2: 128); the body is 'objectivation of the will' (*Objektivierung des Willens*). This is a prime case of will's 'blind activity' (*blinde Thätigkeit*), or of its being 'devoid of cognition' (*erkenntnißlos*),<sup>9</sup> as he frequently puts it, and here will is neither rational, nor conscious, nor mental. The very organized structure and normal

<sup>9</sup> WWR I, 139/SW 2: 136, and WWR 2, 305–16/SW 3: 331–46.

functioning of my body, its growth, and all the processes of it which presuppose neither consciousness nor even mindedness are manifestations of what Schopenhauer now calls will to life (*Wille zum Leben*). The inner nature of the human being is that it tends towards maintaining and propagating life, and this same inner nature is common to every inhabitant of the organic world. A tiger, a sunflower, or a single-celled organism have the same inner nature or essence. Schopenhauer even argues that at the most fundamental level the same inner nature must be that of the whole phenomenal world, not only in the organic but also in the inorganic realm where it underlies the processes of gravitation, magnetism, and crystal formation:

Everything strains and drives towards existence, towards organic existence if possible, i.e. towards life, and then towards the highest possible level of this: in animal nature it is obvious that will to life [*Wille zum Leben*] is the tonic note of its essence, its only immutable and unconditional property.

(WWR 2, 365/SW 3: 399–400)

But my essence is the same as that of every other thing in the world. The boundary between human willing and other processes of organic end-directedness is not one between metaphysical kinds. I as agent have an ‘inner nature’ in virtue of which I tend towards local ends and the over-arching end of life—being alive and reproducing life. And since throughout nature the striving for existence is ‘blind’, not essentially mediated by consciousness, this must apply also to my essence. So what I essentially am is a thing that blindly tends towards living existence. It is crucial to Schopenhauer that I tend by nature not only to preserve my own existence, but to propagate the existence of more living things. For him, reproductive sexuality is as basic to the nature of the human individual as the drive towards continuing his or her own existence. The genitals, he comments, are ‘the true focal point of the will’ (WWR 1, 356/SW 2: 390). The whole body, including the brain, is objecthood of the will, but the organs of reproduction are where the will to life is seen most plainly for what it is.

So what seemed distinctive of human beings, their capacity for intentional action, is just another instance of the will manifesting itself in nature.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, ‘the genuine self is the will to life’ (WWR 2, 621/SW 3: 695): in other words, the real self is the principle of blind striving for existence and reproduction that manifests itself as organic body, as me, the bodily individual, while not pertaining

<sup>10</sup> WWR 1, 353/SW 385–6.



to me alone. And human willing is one among a multitude of ways in which organisms tend towards a *telos*, distinguished from other organic processes merely by the kind of causal antecedents which deflect the organism's course.

Once we regard humanity in this way, we have to attribute to ourselves some of the characteristics of the world at large. The will (the world) is itself groundless and has no exterior purpose. It merely, as a brute fact, manifests itself endlessly as individuals which endlessly strive. Nothing in the world strives or tends as it does for any ultimate reason. It is not to fulfil any *rational purpose*, or because there is a *good* end state to be attained, that plants or crystals grow, or that objects gravitate towards the earth. And so it is with humanity. We each exist as an individual organism that blindly and for no good reason 'gravitates' towards survival and sexual reproduction. Hence, although rational thought and choice are characteristics of human beings, they are not at the core of the human psyche, and are, Schopenhauer believes, explicable as mere instruments of the more fundamental will to life. Even consciousness, let alone the self-consciousness which was earlier proclaimed the true starting-point for philosophy, must be underlain by a nature that is more fundamental than it.

Schopenhauer casts his theory of will from the start in Kantian terms. The world of representation is governed by the laws of space, time and causality, but beyond it lies the realm of the thing in itself, which Kant had left as a riddle. Schopenhauer offers a solution to the riddle: the thing in itself is will. The notion that the will is beyond the realm of the subject's representation of objects licences the idea that the will is beyond the principle of individuation. Hence Schopenhauer can regard it as an undifferentiated whole, not split up into plural individuals at all—though strictly speaking it must be beyond the whole question of plurality and unity. The will is also not causally related to anything, does not exist in time, and is not subject to change.

Forcing his doctrine into this Kantian framework might in retrospect be regarded as one of Schopenhauer's most unfortunate moves—it certainly gives rise to numerous problems of consistency and intelligibility. I could not begin to rehearse them all here, but a couple of consequences are worth noting. First, it is hard for Schopenhauer consistently to separate the notion of the thing in itself considered as the world *apart from all knowability* on the one hand, and the notion of will as the most general form under which the world is *knowable* to us. In the latter sense will is the thing in itself, while in the former it is not.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See WWR 2, 209/SW 3: 221–2.

Secondly, it is hard for Schopenhauer to distinguish the undifferentiated will of which everything in nature is the objective appearance, from the will which is my individual essence or real nature—what I am in myself. Schopenhauer borrows Kant's term 'intelligible character' (*intelligibler Charakter*) for this: the intelligible character is an innate and unchanging disposition of will quite specific to the human individual. Working only with a notion of the thing in itself which places it outside time and space, and thus outside of individuation, makes the notion of the 'in itself' aspect of the individual hard to negotiate, yet Schopenhauer's psychology requires a timeless and unchanging will to underlie all of the individual's conscious states and actions, and to be a character peculiar to that individual.

## 5. Will and Intellect

Many of Schopenhauer's most interesting psychological insights occur in a chapter of the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* entitled 'On the Primacy of the Will in Self-consciousness' (*Vom Primat des Willens im Selbstbewußtseyn*), where he catalogues different ways in which the relationship between primary will and secondary intellect shows up in self-conscious experience. The will is a more primitive, indeed simple and childish part of the psyche. Schopenhauer notes how infants are full of will at a time when their intellect is hardly developed at all:

they are filled to the bursting point with will, and they show this pressure through unruly, aimless rages and screaming, despite the fact that their willing does not yet have an object, i.e., they will without knowing what they will. (WWR 2, 222/SW 3: 236)

In adult life, as soon as the developed intellect represents anything in thought or imagination, this same will, unchanged, responds:

For example, if we are alone with ourselves, thinking over our personal affairs, and then vividly imagine something like the threat of an actually existing danger along with the possibility of an unfortunate outcome, then our heart instantly feels constricted by anxiety and our blood freezes in our veins. But then, if the intellect moves on to the possibility of the opposing outcome and lets the imagination paint a picture of a consequent and

long-desired happiness, all our pulses beat a joyful rhythm and our heart feels light as a feather—until the intellect awakes from its dream.

(WWR 2, 219/SW 3: 232.)

And so on through numerous examples, in which

when the intellect starts to play, the will must dance to its tune: indeed, the intellect lets the will play the role of a child put into different moods by its nurse with her chatter and tales that alternate between joyful and sad.

(WWR 2, 219/SW 3: 232–3.)

However, though the will is simpler than the intellect, it reasserts its true hegemony in the following manner:

This happens when the will forbids the intellect certain representations, when it simply blocks certain trains of thought, because it knows (i.e. it has learned from the very same intellect) that they will arouse in it one of the emotions described above. The will then reins in the intellect and forces it to focus on other things. (WWR 2, 219/SW 3: 233)

Note that the more primitive will has the power of absolutely preventing certain trains of thought from arising in the intellect. That is to say, although such thoughts are in some sense present as ours, we never consciously entertain them. The process of prevention must therefore be an unconscious one. And it is a process that the conscious intellect is powerless to resist:

it must . . . succeed as soon as the will takes it seriously: this is because the resistance involved does not come from the intellect (which always remains indifferent) but rather from the will itself, which is inclined towards a representation in one respect that it abhors in another. This representation is then intrinsically interesting to the will precisely because it moved the will; but at the same time, abstract cognition tells the will that the representation will senselessly expose it to an excruciating or disgraceful agitation.

(WWR 2, 219–20/SW 3: 233)

An extension of the will's repression of thoughts—for that is what we have here—allows Schopenhauer to account for madness (*Wahnsinn*), which for him is a kind of defect of memory. He says,

if the will's resistance and refusal to assimilate some cognition reaches the point where the operation simply cannot be carried out; if, therefore, certain events or circumstances are fully repressed from the intellect because the will cannot bear the sight of them, and if the gap that then arises is patched up with some invention due to the need for coherence—then there is madness.

(WWR 2, 417–18/SW 3: 458)

Schopenhauer gives other examples from everyday life—the sort of thing that ‘any attentive person can observe . . . in himself’ (WWR 2, 222/SW 3: 235)—in which the will makes decisions or plans as it were ‘in secret’, decisions from which the intellect remains excluded and ‘can only learn of them through eavesdropping and taking the will by surprise, as would be the case with a stranger, and must catch the will unawares while it is acting on its decisions simply to find out its true intent’ (WWR 2, 220/SW 3: 234). Consequently, I do not really know how attached I am to a certain obligation or course of action: Schopenhauer narrates examples where a conscious judgement as to the desirability or undesirability of acting thus-and-so is swept away ‘to my own astonishment’ (*zu meinem eigenen Erstaunen*) by a ‘jubilant and irresistible joy’ (*eine jubelnde, unaufhaltsame Freudigkeit*) that reveals the true orientation of my underlying will (WWR 2, 220/SW 3: 234). Many of these eloquent passages are frequently quoted in the literature and constitute Schopenhauer's most visible contributions to the history of thought about the unconscious. The will, as he puts it, has a ‘direct, unconscious, and detrimental influence . . . on cognition’ (WWR 2, 231/SW 3: 245)—and the disadvantage of our natural condition is something we shall see emphasized more as we proceed.

## 6. Sexual Will

One of Schopenhauer's major themes is that the will in nature is greater than the individual living being, and has the individual at its mercy. A prime illustration occurs in his discussion of human sexuality.<sup>12</sup> We saw above how the sexual functioning of the body is the primary expression of the will to life in human beings. The sex drive or sexual impulse (*Geschlechtstrieb*) is the ‘the kernel of the will to life, . . . willing itself in concentrated form’ (WWR 2, 530/SW 3: 588):

<sup>12</sup> See especially his essay ‘The Metaphysics of Sexual Love’, WWR 2, 547–82/SW 3: 607–51.

one can say that the human being is the sex drive made concrete, since he arose from an act of copulation, the wish of all his wishes is to engage in copulation, and this drive alone perpetuates and holds together the whole of his appearance. It is true that the will to life expresses itself mainly as the striving to preserve the individual; but this is only a stage in the effort to preserve the species.... So the sex drive is the most complete expression of the will to life. (WWR 2, 530/SW 3: 588)

It is not surprising, then, if sexual love (*Geschlechtsliebe*) directed towards another individual is a powerful force in human life:

it acts as the final goal of almost every human endeavour, it exercises a detrimental influence on the most important affairs, it interrupts the most serious occupations at every hour, it befuddles sometimes even the greatest minds for a time, it is not afraid to introduce its disturbing trivialities into the negotiations of state ministers and the research of scholars, it understands how to slip love letters and locks of hair even into ministerial portfolios and philosophical manuscripts...taken as a whole, it makes its entrance like a malevolent demon, intent on turning everything upside down, bringing it into chaos and confusion. (WWR 2, 550/SW 3: 610–11)

'It' is clearly being conceived here as some agency or purpose which is not fully subject to the individual's conscious control—though Schopenhauer appears to wish it were. Sexuality is not only ubiquitous for him, but tormenting.<sup>13</sup>

His account of sexual love operates on two levels: at the level of individual consciousness, the other is singled out as the object of desire and idealized. He or she is, apparently, beloved for qualities of value he or she uniquely possesses; and satisfaction of the desire by another interchangeable object is ruled out. Thus it seems to the individual lover. But all this is an illusion, according to Schopenhauer. The individual is merely being used. For at a deeper level, all (heterosexual) sexual desire can be explained functionally as enabling reproduction:

the sex drive is...very clever in knowing how to assume the mask of objective admiration in order to deceive: nature needs this stratagem for its ends. But however objective and tinged with sublimity this admiration might seem, the sole intent of every case of being in love is the procreation of a specifically constituted individual. (WWR 2, 551/SW 3: 612)

<sup>13</sup> As Nietzsche realized; see the well-known passage in GM III:6/KSA 5: 346–8.

Schopenhauer maintains that the 'will of the species' (*Wille der Gattung*, WWR 2, 571/SW 3: 636) directs the behaviour of individuals whilst deluding them that they pursue by choice their own individual preferences and purposes, such as seeking their own pleasure. Since the will as thing in itself is beyond individuation, it lives on in future generations: thus 'the kernel of our being' (*Kern unsers Wesens*) is indestructible and shared with our whole species (WWR 2, 575/SW 3: 642). He even says it is the will to life of the as yet unconceived child that draws a man and a woman to love one another.<sup>14</sup> In general, the unique intensity of the passions that attend sexual behaviour and the (sometimes absurd and ruinous) seriousness with which it is pursued confirm Schopenhauer in his view that it expresses the very core of human inner nature which is the will to life.

## 7. Escaping the Will

Human happiness is frustrated or rendered impossible by the situation as Schopenhauer describes it. The will intrudes upon, and interferes with, our conscious life. For us there can only be perspectival knowing, in that affects, passions, and hidden drives, inclinations, and aversions invariably 'deform, colour, and distort' our judgement and perception (WWR 1, 390/SW 2: 426). The will calls the tune, never leaving us in peace. The sexual drive dominates and torments us. The will is timeless and can never be satisfied, so that fulfilment of any desire brings only a momentary release from pain which yields instantly to more unfulfilled desiring. The will is our essence, but it is our essence that blights our existence. To be an individual expression of will is a condition of purposelessness and suffering—to the extent that, for Schopenhauer, if we really understood the nature of things fully, we should much prefer non-existence. Schopenhauer describes death as the 'great opportunity not to be I any longer' (WWR 2, 524/SW 3: 582). Lapsing back into the unconscious will of nature is a release from individuality and pain.

Schopenhauer's philosophy as a whole unfolds a series of states which redeem what he sees as the absence of positive value in life. Aesthetic experience, in which consciousness is disinterested and temporarily freed of the will, is at one end of the spectrum, extinction of the individual at the other. Value can be retrieved to the extent that the individual embodiment of will abates. One wills less and less, and locates significance less and less in the individual

<sup>14</sup> See WWR 2, 552/SW 3: 613.

living manifestation of will one happens to be. In aesthetic experience willing abates totally but temporarily, and one ceases to be aware of oneself as individual. But similar notions of selfless objectivity apply in Schopenhauer's ethics and philosophy of religion. In describing those who have undergone the ultimate redemption which he calls the denial of the will, Schopenhauer asks us to recall his characterization of aesthetic experience as that of a 'pure, will-less, painless, timeless' subject (*reines, willenloses, schmerzloses, zeitloses Subjekt*) and imagine such a state prolonged indefinitely.<sup>15</sup> Aesthetic objectivity prefigures the disintegration of one's ability to place value in the striving, material individual one is—that disintegration which is for Schopenhauer the sole hope of cheating life of its emptiness of genuine, positive worth. It is sometimes asked whether Schopenhauer's philosophy deserves the title 'pessimism': that it probably does is borne out by his consistent central thought that the very essence of each human being, of humanity, and of the world as a whole causes only grief and is something to escape from, if possible, at all costs.

<sup>15</sup> See WWR 1, 201/SW 2: 210–11; WWR 1, 417/SW 2: 461–2.

## 2

# Necessity, Responsibility, and Character

## Schopenhauer on Freedom of the Will

One of the lessons a long life teaches is how formed we are by characteristics that were entirely beyond our control. Being who we were, we were bound to act the way we did. To have acted differently we would have had to be a different person. Maybe a better person, because, tragic as it may appear, even unfair, there are good people, not so good people, and bad people. And the big discovery we make in life is the person we have been *revealed* to be (Holloway 2012: 226–7).

### 1. Introduction

In 1841 Schopenhauer published an essay on human freedom, which had its origin in a competition set by the Royal Society of Sciences in Norway. Schopenhauer entered his piece anonymously, which prevented him from elaborating the metaphysical system he had developed in the virtually neglected *World as Will and Representation* more than twenty years earlier, and arguably gave him a better purchase on the issues per se. To his great satisfaction he was awarded a prize. The Norwegian society set an apparently rather precise question: ‘Can the freedom of the human will be proved from self-consciousness?’ Schopenhauer’s basic answer to that question is No, at least in the following sense: if we construe freedom as absence of necessity, or liberty of indifference, *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*—the only genuinely contentful sense of the term for Schopenhauer<sup>1</sup>—and take freedom of the will to require that some episodes of human willing do *not* happen of necessity, then *self-consciousness* cannot prove freedom of the will, because self-consciousness is powerless to grasp whether the willing that it apprehends is

<sup>1</sup> ‘*liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* . . . is incidentally the single clearly determinate, stable and clear cut concept of what is called free will; hence one cannot depart from it without falling into wavering, misty explanations, behind which hides a hesitant half-heartedness’ (FW, 36/SW 4: 9).



necessitated or not. In phenomenological terms I do not regard my willing as necessitated, but self-consciousness alone is unable to settle either way the question of its necessitation. And if I look beyond self-consciousness, I find, in a straightforwardly Kantian way, that everything that can possibly occur as an experienceable event in space and time is governed by the law of causality. Those events that are my acts of will are part of the experienceable world in space and time, so they too must follow of necessity from causes. The fact that the causal history of my acts of will is not transparent to self-consciousness may partially explain why we are tempted to regard ourselves as subject to no necessity; but more importantly it explains why self-consciousness cannot prove the freedom of the human will.

So the outline of Schopenhauer's answer is in two parts: for all I know in my self-consciousness, my willing can perfectly well be necessitated by prior grounds, and so may not be free; but from what I know independently of self-consciousness, my willing cannot but be necessitated by prior grounds, and so must not be free. This tight argumentative structure is clearly discernible through the characteristically Schopenhauerian presentation of the essay, with its habits of prolixity, digression and literary example, and its bravura rhetoric. A justly famous passage is the following:

Let us think of a human being who, while standing in the street, say, might say to himself: 'It is six o'clock in the evening, the day's work is ended. I can now go for a walk; or I can go to the club; I can also climb the tower to see the sun going down; I can also go to the theatre; I can also visit this friend, or again that one; yes, I can even run out of the gate into the wide world and never return. All of that is solely up to me, I have total freedom over it; and yet I am doing none of that now, but am going home with just as much free will, to my wife.' That is exactly as if water were to speak: 'I can strike up high waves (yes! in the sea and storm), I can rush down in a hurry (yes! in the bed of a stream), I can fall down foaming and spraying (yes! in a waterfall), I can rise freely as a jet into the air (yes! in a fountain), finally I can even boil away and disappear (yes! at 80° of heat); and yet I am doing none of all that now, but I am staying with free will calm and clear in the mirroring pond.' Just as water can do all of that only when the determining causes to one thing or the other occur, so that human being can in no way do what he imagines he can do except under the same condition. Until the causes occur it is impossible for him: but then he *must* do it, just as much as the water when it is placed in the corresponding circumstances. (FW, 62–3/SW 4: 42)

Case closed? Well, not entirely. Because there is still an inescapable sense of agency, of 'being the doer of the deed', of feeling responsible for one's actions. Going home to his wife is something the man *does*, and he is aware that it is something he is doing. His wife would hold him responsible, and probably blameworthy, if he disappeared into the wide world instead; she would not hold him responsible for an event that was not a deed of his, such as his falling off the tower because of a strong gust of wind.

Though obvious in common sense, this sense of agency is puzzling. For Schopenhauer it cannot require an absence of necessitation, or groundlessness, or uncaused spontaneity in one's willed actions. What we do, we do necessarily. Nevertheless, he is convinced that the feeling of responsibility, of being the doer, must be warranted. His position now involves a difficult combination of claims. For even though the individual's phenomenology of willing and acting must be regarded as *erroneous* if it delivers the conviction that his or her actions are not causally determined, it must now be considered *reliable* in presenting the sense of being a responsible agent. There are two points to raise here. First, on what grounds should we regard the deliverance of phenomenology with regard to causality as faulty, and the deliverance of the same phenomenology with regard to responsibility as truthful? If the absence of causal necessity is an illusion, what prevents us from saying the same about responsibility? Secondly, the very idea of this split implicitly commits Schopenhauer to a kind of compatibilism between determinism and responsibility: it is true that actions are causally determined, but also true that agents are responsible for those actions. We shall return to these issues later.

Schopenhauer's solution, to save genuine responsibility in the face of the necessitation of action, is to say that we really feel responsibility, and have responsibility, for what we *are*—for our character—rather than for what we do. The *doing* merely reveals the character, and what we feel is a deep awareness of *being* the one from whom the action issued with necessity. To negotiate this distinction Schopenhauer invokes Kant's distinction between empirical and intelligible characters, which, he says, 'belongs among the most beautiful and most profoundly thought products of this great mind, and indeed of human beings ever' (FW, 107/SW 4: 95). But here we enter treacherous territory. The notion of an intelligible, non-empirical character is, to say the least, hard to grasp. The interpretation of Kant's original version of the intelligible character is itself fraught with difficulty and contention; on some readings it emerges as something incredible, if not incoherent. Then there is the further complication that Schopenhauer puts the Kantian distinction to his

own idiosyncratic use, attempting to fit it into a picture of agency and responsibility that is really radically different from Kant's.

Writing on Kant's theory of freedom, Henry Allison offers the following general observation which may provide a helpful start:

Very roughly, act attribution seems to be subject to two conflicting requirements. First, the action must be regarded as something the agent 'does' of itself, as opposed to being the result of something 'done' to the agent. This can be called the 'activity requirement', which is a necessary condition for an act to be attributed to an agent. Second, the action must be explicable in terms of the agent's nature or character. This may be called the 'explicability requirement', and it is a necessary condition for attributing any motivation to the agent. (Allison 1990: 28)

When the matter is put in these terms, Kant 'insists that the activity requirement can be met only by an incompatibilist conception of freedom' (Allison 1990). So although one might think that explaining an action in terms of the agent's empirical character leaves open the possibility of attributing the action to the agent as something 'done', Kant insists that such an explanation, which will always be deterministic, does not leave room for a proper conception of the action as 'done' or the agent as its 'doer'. Instead we require the idea of something non-empirical: the intelligible character of the acting subject, 'its character as a thing in itself', something 'through which it is indeed the cause of those actions as appearances, but which does not stand under any conditions of sensibility and is not itself appearance' (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A539/B567).

If the matter is put in these terms, what is Schopenhauer's position? He too holds that both the activity requirement and the explicability requirement must be met, and that they both can be met; furthermore he argues that the empirical explicability of an act in terms of the agent's character and motivation leaves no room for an empirical account of the agent's being 'the doer of the deed'. Hence the activity requirement must be met in a 'transcendental' way, again by reference to the agent's 'intelligible character'. So to this extent Schopenhauer's view is a genuine variant of Kant's. However, the appropriation of Kantian terminology here can be grossly misleading as to the nature of Schopenhauer's position. In *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer states that the Third Antinomy in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is 'the point where Kant's philosophy leads to my own, or where mine grows from the stem of Kant's' (WWR 1, 531/SW 2: 595). Yet Schopenhauer's view

of morality, character and selfhood diverges markedly from Kant's, and Schopenhauer wants to make substantive metaphysical claims about the will as thing in itself, of the kind that Kant studiously avoided. None of this deters Schopenhauer, who audaciously opines 'I think it is likely that whenever Kant spoke about the thing in itself, he was already thinking obscurely of the will [in Schopenhauer's conception of it] in the darkest depths of his mind' (WWR 1, 535/SW 2: 599). There is reason to think, however, that if Kant had lived to see this wayward offshoot of his theory brought to light, he might well have been horrified to be associated with it.

In the remainder of this piece I undertake the following tasks: a more detailed presentation of Schopenhauer's case against freedom with respect to acts of will (section 2); an account of Schopenhauer's attempt to meet the 'activity' requirement (section 3); an outline of relevant divergences between Schopenhauer and Kant over the intelligible character (section 4); an argument suggesting that the intelligible character may be redundant to Schopenhauer's position (section 5); and an argument that in his position the intelligible character cannot coherently be that of an individual agent, with the result that the individual has no freedom of will (section 6).

## 2. The Case against Free Will

The problem of free will that Schopenhauer addresses is effectively this: Given what falls within the cognition of a given individual at some time, and in fact causes a particular willed action, *could* they have performed a different willed action at that time than the one they did? Could they have willed something different? Was their willing free? But now Schopenhauer observes that something strange happens to the ordinary or 'popular' concept of freedom here. Ordinarily someone is considered free if there is no hindrance to their doing what they will: 'in terms of this concept "free" means "in accordance with one's own will"' (FW, 34/SW 4: 6). But if someone is free just in case nothing prevents them from acting in accordance with their will, how can we even pose the question whether their willing is free? Are we asking 'Can you will in accordance with your will?'—that, as Schopenhauer points out, ends in an absurd regress. So to make it workable, the concept of freedom has to be modified; it then becomes equivalent to 'the absence of all necessity in general'. The central question then emerges as: 'Is human willing subject to necessity or not?'

Schopenhauer next defines 'necessary', leaning on what he had expounded in his earliest publication, the doctoral dissertation of 1813, *On the Fourfold*

*Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.* There Schopenhauer argued that the notion of a 'ground' (*Grund*) is ambiguous: not all grounds are of the same type. For instance, a judgement has empirical evidence or a prior judgement as its (justificatory) ground, the ground of a figure's being a triangle is its having three sides, a cause is the ground of its effect, a motive is the ground of an action. However, one point on which Schopenhauer is insistent is that the relation between any ground and its consequent is one of *necessity*. And the definition of 'necessary' that operates throughout the essay is 'that which follows from a given sufficient ground'. The Norwegian Society's question, then, is again analysed out into a more precise question: can self-consciousness decide whether human actions follow by necessity from a given sufficient ground?

Schopenhauer holds that when I am conscious of myself, of my inside or interior, as he often puts it, or of the arena in which my experience occurs, as opposed to some object that presents itself as external to me, then I find states such as

decisive acts of will that immediately become deeds, . . . formal decisions . . . desiring, striving, wishing, longing, yearning, hoping, loving, enjoying, rejoicing and the like, . . . not-willing or resisting, and detesting, fleeing, fearing, being angry, hating, grieving, suffering pain, in short all affects and passions. (FW, 38/SW 4: 11)

All of these he classes as 'movements of the will' of different polarities, tones, and intensities. We do not, he suggests, encounter ourselves in our own cognition as cognizing beings, a claim he repeats in the companion piece to the freedom essay, *On the Basis of Morals*:

through inner sense we cognize the continuing series of our strivings and acts of will which arise on the occasion of external motives, and finally also the manifold weaker or stronger movements of our own will, to which all inner feelings can be reduced. That is all: for the cognizing (*das Erkennen*) is not itself cognized in turn. (BM, 250/SW 4: 266)

The self that meets us 'within', in the arena of consciousness, is fundamentally conative and affective, concerned with trying, striving, acting and feeling positively or negatively towards things. We might think that if self-consciousness taps exclusively into the will in this way, then it should be the prime means by which we discover the will's freedom, if it has freedom, or, if it

has none, its subjection to necessity. But no: Schopenhauer argues that, although it is an easy and almost unavoidable mistake to *think* that self-consciousness reveals the will's freedom, self-consciousness is simply incapable of deciding the crucial question. The truth is that by examining our 'inside', leaving out any considerations concerning the external world, we ascertain nothing at all about the relation between the grounds of our acts of will and those acts of will themselves.

The ordinary person recognizes the following as true: 'I can do what I will.' And it is this that the ordinary person takes to be freedom of the will. And, we may add, so does the rather simple philosophical position known as classical compatibilism, what we are used to locating in Hobbes' notion 'liberty of the man . . . which consisteth in this, that he finds no stop, in doing what he has the will, desire, or inclination to doe' (Hobbes 1975: 110) or in Hume's '*power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will*'; that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may' (Hume 2006, Section 8.23). But, Schopenhauer objects, freedom of *doing*, freedom of *acting*, is crucially different from freedom of *willing*. If you had willed to turn to the right, and were not restrained, paralysed, drugged and so on, then you would have done so; equally, if you had willed to turn to the left, you would have done so. But this tells us nothing about whether we could equally have *willed* to turn to the right or to the left. We cannot know that on the basis of self-consciousness alone, Schopenhauer claims, because here we reach a kind of bedrock:

If we now say: 'But your willing itself, what does that depend on?' then the person will answer out of self-consciousness: 'On nothing at all but me! I can will what I will: what I will, that I will.' . . . [P]ressed to the extreme here, he speaks of a willing of his willing, which is as if he spoke of an I of his I. We have driven him back to the core of his self-consciousness, where he encounters his I and his will as indistinguishable, but nothing is left over to judge them both. (FW, 44–5/SW 4: 20)

The familiar and elusive sense of being the source of one's actions could be expressed either by saying that it is my will, not some external cause, that is the source of my action, or by saying that I, not some external cause, was the source of my action. We can say 'it was up to me that I turned left and not right'; or 'I turned left and not right simply because I willed to.' But—so Schopenhauer suggests here—we are not saying anything further if we try to elucidate either of these locutions in terms of the other. To say that *I* am the

source of my *will*, or that my *willing* to turn left was *up to me*, really adds nothing.

Schopenhauer argues, then, that we can know in self-consciousness that we can do what we will, but that although it is natural to feel that we are thereby conscious of our will as free, that is really an illusion. As he comments, that answers the question that was set. Can the freedom of the human will be proved from self-consciousness? No it cannot. But Schopenhauer seeks to strengthen his case further. What if we look beyond self-consciousness? If we find from examining our cognition of the external world that there is no such thing as a willing free from necessity, then we would not just be contingently unable to prove freedom of the will from self-consciousness; rather we would learn that it is *impossible* to have evidence of freedom of the will in self-consciousness, because it is impossible for us to be inwardly conscious of something that simply does not exist anyway. Shifting from self-consciousness to 'consciousness of other things', Schopenhauer argues that nowhere in the objective world is there an exception to the rule that whatever happens, happens necessarily as the consequent of some ground. So there is no free will in the world of our outer experience, the intuited or empirical world. Schopenhauer has two basic lines of argument here. (1) A Kantian claim: it is a universal principle knowable a priori that every event in the empirical realm has a cause from which it follows with necessity. (2) An argument from continuity throughout nature: at every point, from the inanimate realm, through plants, animals in general and finally human beings, causality is at work, and proceeding stepwise we find no radical break where necessity can be seen to lapse. Schopenhauer distinguishes three different manifestations of causality: sheer cause and effect, which operates at the level of physics and chemistry, then stimulus and response, to which plants and animals are susceptible, then motive and action, the sphere of creatures with minds that can cognize the world and provide mental representations that function as motives for their willed behaviour. Finally in this hierarchy there occurs rationality. In this case a creature has the capacity to develop representations which are general concepts, in addition to mere intuitions of the here and now. When we have concepts, we can make judgements, think about past and future, make inferences and act upon deliberation, and such judgements and inferences are motives—i.e. causes—of our willed actions. Because of the complexity of thought and action in this final case, and because the connection of actions with their causes is often quite remote—a belief you formed ten years ago and a piece of ratiocination you went through last week might cause your action today—we are tempted to see rationally motivated human action

as of quite another kind from the simple cases of cause and effect. But rational human action, as part of what occurs in the natural world, is as much subject to the necessity of consequent following on ground as any other kind of event—a non-rational animal's moving upon seeing its prey, a plant's moving upon the stimulus of sunlight, or even (as we saw above) the diverse behaviour of water when subject to various causes.

Motivation is 'causality that goes through *cognition*' (FW, 54/SW 4: 31). A motive is an object of cognition, and thus in Schopenhauer's view is a representation for the subject of cognition. It is a representation that causes willed action. A qualification, as we shall see below, is that Schopenhauer recognizes the possibility of deliberating between motives, hence something can be a motive without in fact being acted upon, without in fact causing a willed action. Let us say, then, that a motive is a conscious perception or thought that occurs in a subject's consciousness and causes, or is at least apt to cause, a willed action of that subject. Schopenhauer says further:

the act of will, which itself is at first only an object of self-consciousness, arises on the occasion of something that belongs to consciousness of other things, thus something that is an object for the cognitive faculty, an object that, in this relation, is called a motive and at the same time is the material of the act of will, in the sense that the act of will is directed towards it, i.e. aims at some alteration in it, or reacts to it'. (FW, 40/SW 4: 14)

We must bear in mind throughout that 'act of will' (*Willensakt* or *Akt des Willens*) for Schopenhauer is equivalent to 'willed action'. There is no such thing as a purely mental 'act of will' (or 'volition') standing in a causal relation to bodily action.<sup>2</sup> There is willed bodily action, whose causes are occurrent motives. Acts of will are the effects of cognitive states which give them their particular aim or content.

Schopenhauer's conception of will is complex and in some ways baffling. But a couple of remarks may be appropriate here by way of orientation. First, *acts* of will are the tip of an iceberg for Schopenhauer, the highest in a hierarchy of states which can also be called willing, or manifestations of will. In fact, all of any organism's behaviour can be embraced by this term for him, and in this sense *will* amounts to 'end-directed activity'. It matters not whether the activity is rational or non-rational, learned or instinctive, conscious or unconscious, or even whether it is the activity of the organism as a whole or

<sup>2</sup> See WWR 1, 124–5/SW 2: 119.



merely a subfunction of the organism. The end of the heart's beating is circulation of blood and life for the organism, the end of the wasp's nest-building is protecting its offspring, the end of the cat's crouching in the grass is its catching a smaller animal, the end of my flinching is to avoid a missile, the end of my catching a train is to go to Berlin. We do not normally *call* all of these willing, because in normal usage 'willing' applies to *acts* of will, which most of the above are not. So in the normal sense it would just be silly to extend the term in this way. But Schopenhauer thinks that we should see how all these end-directed activities in nature have a common essence. Everything in nature is constantly striving, and the common essence of the world is *will*, in this extended sense of the term. This commonality among the species and processes of nature is metaphysically basic for Schopenhauer. So in answer to the question 'What exists in reality?' he answers: striving activity, which manifests itself to experience as multiple, distinct spatiotemporal individuals and events. But since all such individuals and events share the same essence, dichotomies such as conscious/unconscious, rational/non-rational, personal/subpersonal are not metaphysically basic for Schopenhauer.

Let us return to acts of will. They are a specific kind of natural end-directed activity on the part of an organism: namely, episodes of end-directed activity that are caused by conscious objective cognition that provides the activity with its particular end. Humans are distinguished from other animals by having the ability to choose (*Wahlentscheidung*<sup>3</sup>), and he grants that this gives humans a 'relative freedom'. But that means simply that the range of causes for their actions is not restricted to present intuitive experience through the senses: by contrast with other animals a human being 'determines himself independently of present objects, according to thoughts which are *his* motives' (FW, 57/SW 4: 35):

By means of his capacity for thought the human being can make present to himself the motives whose influence on his will he senses, in any order he likes, in alternation and repeatedly, to hold them before his will, which is called *reflecting*: he is able to deliberate, and because of this ability has a much greater choice than is possible for an animal... [But] only a very superficial viewpoint can take that relative and comparative freedom for an absolute freedom, a *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*. The capacity for deliberation that arises through that freedom in fact produces nothing other than the frequently troubling *conflict of motives*, over which indecision presides,

<sup>3</sup> See WWR 1, 324/SW 2: 351; WWR 1, 327/SW 2: 355.

and whose battle ground is the entire mind and consciousness of the human being. For he repeatedly allows the motives to try their force upon his will in competition with one another, whereby the will gets into the same state that a body is in when different forces work in different directions—until finally the decidedly strongest motive beats the others off the field and determines the will, an outcome that is called a resolve [*Entschluß*], and that occurs with full *necessity* as the result of the conflict. (FW, 57–8/SW 4: 35–6)

How plausible is this as an account of deliberation? If we were to take it as a description of the phenomenology of deliberation, we must regard it as wildly off the mark. After all, it does not normally feel to the human deliberator as if he or she is the spectator of a battleground, or as if the resolve is the mere product of different forces, like the movement of a physical object. The outcome will be regarded as a resolve only if it at least *seems* that it was not necessitated by any of the motives. At times Schopenhauer appears to deny even this phenomenology, for example when he says that our intellect is a ‘spectator’ that regards the outcome of deliberation as indeterminate, while it ‘waits for the true decision as passively and with the same eager curiosity as if it were someone else’s will’, and when he says the process is in principle ‘just the same as if we were to look at a vertical pole that has come unbalanced and is wobbling and say “it can fall to the right or to the left”’ (WWR 1, 317–18/SW 2: 343–4). But I would argue there is a better way to construe such passages. It is not that we *experience* ourselves as awaiting our own decisions passively: we experience ourselves as being in control and actively making them—after all, says Schopenhauer, the naïve viewpoint of the ordinary person is ‘everything I do is entirely up to me’. The images of the intellect awaiting a decision, of a play of forces pushing the will around like a falling pole, are meant as *correctives* to that ordinary phenomenology, not as bizarre attempts to evoke it. They have a parallel function to the water example quoted above, where we are to imagine an inanimate substance having a phenomenology, solely to reveal how *erroneous* that phenomenology would be. The upshot for Schopenhauer is that the human capacity for deliberation in no way points to a *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*.

So Schopenhauer has argued that since all motives, whether rational or not, are a species of causes, they give rise to our willed action with necessity. To complete the picture, however, he has to give some account of what it is that the motives operate upon. And here he turns to the notion of *character*. In explaining the behaviour of anything when causes exert an influence on it, we must presuppose that the constitution of the thing, of whatever kind it is,

interacts with the cause to produce the necessary effect. To use an example similar to some of Schopenhauer's own, the heat of the sun produces effects on water, wax, growing fruit, and human skin, but while the heat remains the same, the difference in the effects depends on the nature of the thing affected. The effect of motives on human action similarly depends on the character of the individual human being, for although there is a species character of human beings, Schopenhauer is also quite certain that human character is individual.

The individual's character, he claims, is something discovered empirically, even for the person whose character it is, something inborn, and something constant that never changes. Schopenhauer also calls this intrinsic unchanging character the individual's will. It is opposed to the intellect, the malleable medium of cognition, and constitutes the core, the very being of the person him- or herself. Schopenhauer produces anecdotal evidence for the claim that character is unchanging, some from popular sayings and attitudes, some from poets and dramatists, some from authorities in classical antiquity<sup>4</sup>—though in truth this really only establishes that it has often been believed that character is individual, inborn and unchanging. Despite aligning himself with this popular view, Schopenhauer leaves room for some moral improvement in an individual's behaviour. Character cannot be changed, but if the same person in the same circumstances had different cognitive states to motivate their will, then they might well act quite differently. So by enlarging people's knowledge of the world and enabling them to understand better both their own characters and the situations in which they act, we can teach people to become susceptible to new motives:

no moral influence reaches further than the correction of cognition, and the undertaking to remove the character faults of a human being through talking and moralizing and thus wanting to re-shape his character itself, his intrinsic morality, is just the same as the proposal to transform lead into gold by external influence, or to bring an oak tree, by careful tending, to the point of bearing apricots. (FW, 72/SW 4: 52)

In a succinct summary of Schopenhauer's position and its relation to Kant's, Allison has written: 'Schopenhauer's denial of freedom of the will rests not only on the universal scope of causality and the conception of motives as causes, but also on his core doctrine of the unchangeableness of character' (Allison 2006: 409). However, it is not clear that Schopenhauer's case against

<sup>4</sup> See FW, 68–77/SW 4: 48–58.

freedom strictly requires this unchangeableness of character. Suppose instead that my character develops and changes in some way over time: I tend to be mean and resentful in some contexts during a period spanning times  $t_1$  to  $t_n$ , but for times after  $t_n$  I tend to be more generous and forgiving in the same kinds of context. Schopenhauer would say that all that has changed here is our *knowledge* of the character: it was more complex than anyone had yet realized, and a new context revealed a new facet of what was there all along. But if we insist in construing such a case as a genuine change in character, need the overall picture be altered? Schopenhauer can still say that the willed actions of the individual human being are determined by a combination of motives that enter his or her cognition and the particular character upon which they impact. The question need not be whether at every time in my life it was possible for me, under provocation of qualitatively identical experiences, to act differently from the way I in fact act on some particular occasion. The only question is: given who I was at the time I acted, and given these experiences, was I necessitated to act? If we imagine me with my character *on that occasion* unchanged, having the same thoughts and experiences in the same circumstances, then by Schopenhauer's arguments we must conclude that my action would be just the same again. In this sense we do whatever we do necessarily. So on the face of it the unchangeableness of character is a dispensable premise at least in the negative part of Schopenhauer's case, his argument against freedom in the case of individual, empirical acts of will. Allison expresses Schopenhauer's position as 'our (empirical) character is something with which we are born and cannot change' (2006: 409). But note a distinction here: *we* cannot change our character—right. If Schopenhauer thought that that kind of change were possible, he would be in quite a different place. But it is not possible: our character is our will, our fundamental set of dispositions to act. We of course do not have the power to change our will at will. But it does not follow from that that our set of dispositions to act can never vary over time, which would have to be established, if at all, on other grounds. I have suggested that even if it cannot be established, a version of Schopenhauer's negative case still stands.

### 3. Doers of Our Deeds

As intimated above, the final chapter of Schopenhauer's essay on freedom takes us in a different, more positive, and more challenging direction:

If in consequence of our presentation so far we have entirely removed all freedom of human action and recognized it as thoroughly subordinate to the strictest necessity, we have now been led in that very process to the point where we will be able to grasp *true moral freedom*, which is of a higher kind. (FW, 105/SW 4: 93)

The *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* does not exist. But there is something called freedom after all. The account so far is unsatisfying because of its neglect of the ‘activity requirement’. We have excluded from consideration the fact that we *feel responsible* for what we do, our ‘unshakeable certainty that we ourselves are *the doers of our deeds*’ (FW, 105/SW 4: 93). So unshakeable is this sense of ourselves that even the conviction that determinism is true and our willing necessitated cannot remove it. As Schopenhauer says (BM, 173/SW 4: 175) even the reader wholly convinced by his theoretical arguments and examples will not try to duck responsibility for his or her actions on the grounds that they followed necessarily from his or her occurrent motives and character. This seems a roughly accurate picture of a persistent attitude we have towards our own actions—though of course there are, to say the least, a number of routes one could pursue from this point, from ascribing the feeling of certainty to mere illusion, to invoking the duality of subjective and objective viewpoints upon actions, or the duality of practical and theoretical standpoints, or arguing that the attitude in which we regard ourselves as responsible is more central to our self-understanding than any commitment we could have to the theoretical standpoint from which our actions are seen as determined.<sup>5</sup>

Schopenhauer’s line here is as follows: the unshakeable certainty is not an illusion, we really are responsible, but not for our deeds, rather for our being or essence. Schopenhauer’s argument has not shown, as he now reminds us, that there is an *absolute* necessity attaching to the occurrence of any particular human action. Suppose that someone is hungry and steals an enticing-looking apple from a market-stall. It is not necessary *tout court* that some such event take place here and now: rather, it is just because the motives and the circumstance worked upon *this human being* in particular that this act of stealing took place:

quite another action, indeed the action directly opposed to his own, was after all entirely possible and could have happened, *if only he had been another*:

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Nietzsche, HH I, 39/KSA 2: 63; Nagel 1979: 198–9; Korsgaard 1996: 183, 203–5; Strawson 1974.

this alone is what it depended on. *For him*, because he is this one and not another, because he has such and such a character, no other action was indeed possible; but in itself, and thus objectively, it was possible. So the *responsibility* he is conscious of relates only provisionally and ostensibly to the deed, but fundamentally to *his character*: it is for *this* that he feels himself responsible. And it is for *this* that others hold him responsible . . . . The deed, along with the motive, comes into consideration merely as evidence of the character of the doer, but counts as a sure symptom of it, by which it is discovered irrevocably and forever. (FW, 105–6/SW 4: 93–4)

But, he then argues, this kind of responsibility must concern not our empirical being, but our intelligible character, the thing in itself that we timelessly are:

For as an object of experience the empirical character is, like the whole human being, a mere appearance, and so bound to the forms of all appearance, time, space and causality, and subordinate to their laws; by contrast, that which as thing in itself is independent of these forms and so subordinate to no time distinction, and is therefore the enduring and unalterable condition and foundation of this whole appearance, is his *intelligible character*, i.e. his will as thing in itself, to which, in this capacity, there certainly also pertains absolute freedom, i.e. independence from the law of causality (as a mere form of appearances). This freedom is, however, *transcendental*, i.e. not occurring in appearance, but present only in so far as we abstract from appearance and all its forms, so as to reach that which, outside all time, is to be thought as the inner essence of the human being in himself. By way of this freedom all deeds of the human being are his own work, however necessarily they issue from the empirical character upon its coincidence with motives—because this empirical character is merely the appearance of the intelligible character in our *faculty of cognition* . . . i.e. it is the mode and manner in which the essence in itself of our own self presents itself to the faculty of cognition. Consequently the *will* is indeed free, but only in itself and outside of appearance: . . . .

This way leads, as is easy to see, to the point that we have to seek the work of our *freedom* no longer in our individual actions, as the common view does, but in the whole being and essence (*existentia et essentia*) of the human being himself, which must be thought of as a free deed that merely presents itself for the faculty of cognition, linked to time, space and causality, in a plurality and diversity of actions—actions which nonetheless, precisely because of the original unity of what presents itself in them, must all bear exactly the same

character and so appear as strictly necessitated by the motives by which they are called forth and individually determined on each occasion.

(FW, 107–8/SW 4: 96–7)

So this is where Schopenhauer seems to put himself in the same camp as Kant, on whose distinction of empirical and intelligible characters he lavishes such praise. We now turn to the thorny issues surrounding this assimilation of what I have claimed are two quite different positions.

#### 4. The Intelligible Character: Schopenhauer and Kant

One set of issues here concerns the epistemic and ontological status of talk about the intelligible character. Is my intelligible character, my character as thing in itself, posited as something really existing? Or is it only that we must operate ‘as if’ I were such a thing, ‘under the idea of’ my being such a thing, with no serious ontological claim being made? And is the intelligible character knowable? Can assertions that there is such a thing as my intelligible character, or assertions about what it is or does, be regarded as knowledge-claims? Depending on how we read him, Kant answers one or both of these questions with more caution (and more complication) than Schopenhauer. If Kant posits a really existing non-empirical character, it is one whose bare possibility we may assert, but of which we can have no knowledge and must remain ‘austere metaphysical skeptics’, as Allen Wood has put it (Wood 2005: 98). On other recent readings—accused by Wood (2005: 99–100) of lacking any genuine basis in Kant’s writings—the position is that the intelligible character should not be regarded as any really existing non-empirical kind of thing, and rather indicates a viewpoint or an aspect, a way of thinking of ourselves that is required in order to regard ourselves as rational agents. This can be explained in terms of a duality of practical versus theoretical viewpoints, as in Korsgaard: ‘the role of the idea of freedom and the intelligible world is . . . a practical one. It provides a conception of ourselves which motivates us to obey the moral law’ (Korsgaard 1996: 174). Or as in Allison: ‘[transcendental] idealism allows for the possibility of considering . . . an agent from two points of view’; ‘not propounding a noumenalistic metaphysics but simply describing how subjects, qua responsible moral agents, must take themselves’ (Allison 1990: 52, 141).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See also Bok 1998: 158–62.

For Schopenhauer my intelligible character is decidedly meant to be metaphysically real, an 'essence in itself', my very *being* (*existentia*), and to be more fundamentally real than anything in the empirical world of appearance. Does Schopenhauer also think it is possible to have knowledge of the intelligible character? Despite some hesitancy in later reflections over whether, or in what sense, we can know the thing in itself at all,<sup>7</sup> he is cavalier about the overall prospects for metaphysical knowledge of what lies beyond the empirical realm, regarding Kant's austerity here as a position of despair.<sup>8</sup> As regards self-knowledge he says on the one hand 'we come to know ourselves . . . only *empirically*, and have no cognition *a priori* of our character' (BM, 175/SW 4: 178), but on the other hand when he says we might 'abstract from appearance and all its forms, so as to reach that which . . . is to be thought as the inner essence of the human being in himself', a kind of knowledge of our essence in itself seems implied. We can at least know that we have a real inner essence and know that it is will, even if what it wills only becomes available empirically as our actions unfold.

But more glaring differences between Schopenhauer and Kant appear in connection with the notions of rationality and causality. Whatever its precise status is supposed to be, the 'causality of reason' is fundamental to Kant's account of freedom: 'Suppose now that one could say reason has causality in regard to appearance: could reason's action then be called free even though in its empirical character . . . it is all precisely determined and necessary?' (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A551/B579). It is in the idea of 'pure reason, as a merely intelligible faculty', in 'the causality of reason in the intelligible character' that freedom is to be located for Kant. Kant might have been surprised to find his term 'intelligible character' applied to something that is explicitly neither rational nor in any sense causal—yet this is the case with Schopenhauer's version of it. The intelligible character for him is the *will* that is consistently expressed in the human individual. In *The World as Will and Representation* we are told that (even in Kant) the distinction of empirical and intelligible characters concerns 'the relationship . . . between the will as thing in itself and its appearance in time' (WWR 1, 180/SW 2: 185), and the intelligible character 'is the will as thing in itself, to the extent that it appears in a particular individual' (WWR 1, 315–16/SW 2: 341). But, as we saw, the Schopenhauerian will is not essentially rational; it is essentially non-rational. The essence or 'core' of each individual is a disposition to strive in certain

<sup>7</sup> See WWR 2, 209/SW 3: 221–2.

<sup>8</sup> See WWR 1, 455/SW 2: 507: *Verzweiflung* is Schopenhauer's word (pretty strong coming from him?).



end-directed ways towards various kinds of ends. Rationality is something that occurs when one particular subclass of causes moves this core disposition into action in particular ways. Reason can be accounted for wholly empirically, in terms of occurrent thoughts and processes of inference that impact causally on the underlying striving disposition of the individual and bring about action. So reason is not the essence, the underlying thing in itself, even of rational beings; and the rational motives we act upon delineate 'only the inessential features of this appearance [empirical character], the outer shape of our life's course' (WWR 1, 328/SW 2: 356).

On the relation between the intelligible character and empirical acts of will, Schopenhauer says what he thinks Kant should have said plainly if he were sticking to his own principles: the relation cannot be causal. 'When we speak of cause and effect, the relation of the will to its appearance (or of the intelligible character to the empirical) should never be introduced... because it is completely different from a causal relation' (WWR 1, 536/SW 2: 601). Schopenhauer takes the opportunity to renew the more general complaint made by Kant's 'first opponents',<sup>9</sup> the charge being that Kant is grossly inconsistent over causality and the thing in itself: 'after constantly insisting that the categories, and thus the category of causality too, could only ever be applied to possible experience: they are merely forms of the understanding that serve to spell out the appearances in the sensible world and have absolutely no meaning above and beyond this, etc.', Kant nevertheless gives the impression of inferring the thing in itself, an intelligible cause, as a requirement of the world's being an appearance (WWR 1, 532/SW 2: 595–6). But whatever 'intelligible causality' might be, it could not strictly be *causality*. Or if we are compelled *faute de mieux* to think of it as if it were causality, that thought should only have the status of a metaphor. Schopenhauer's non-sense attitude is: instead of facing this awful tangle over whether intelligible causality is causality or not, and incurring at least the suspicion of some kind of fudge, just stick to the principle that causality only operates in the empirical realm, and have done with it. A similar point would apply to any notion of causality that treated it as some relation of ground and consequent. For Schopenhauer all forms of the principle of sufficient reason that relate grounds to consequents must concern only the relations among representations for the subject (this being the central thread of argument throughout *On the Fourfold Root*). So Schopenhauer rules out any attempt to have the empirical grounded in, or necessitated by, the intelligible.

<sup>9</sup> Notably Jacobi, though Schopenhauer mentions no names here.

Schopenhauer himself admittedly says that the intelligible character ‘determines’ (*bestimmt*) the empirical character (BM, 173/SW 4: 175), but immediately explicates that as its being ‘equally present in all the individual’s deeds and stamped on them like the cachet (*Petschaft*) in a thousand seals’. Elsewhere he characterizes the empirical character as merely ‘the temporal unfolding of an extra-temporal . . . intelligible character’ (WWR 1, 328/SW 2: 355–6), and uses another analogy:

Just as the entire tree is simply the constantly repeated appearance of one and the same drive, which . . . recurs and is easily recognized in the construction of the leaf, stem, branch and trunk, similarly all human deeds are just the constantly repeated expression of the intelligible character, only somewhat varied in form, and the empirical character is an induction based on the summation of these expressions. (WWR 1, 316/SW 2: 341–2)

The relation we seek between empirical acts and intelligible character is thus one of ‘unfolding’, ‘expressing’, or ‘showing the presence of’. We seem to have a version of the rather traditional notion of an underlying, non-plural, timeless reality revealing a manifest aspect of itself in multiple instantiations through time—a notion whose general merits we cannot debate here, although it would arguably constitute a mysterious and ontologically rather expensive way of accounting for free will.

One of the harder specifics to swallow in Schopenhauer’s treatment of the intelligible character is his description of it as an *act* of will or a *deed*: ‘an extra-temporal and thus indivisible and unchanging act of will’ (WWR 1, 316/SW 2: 341), ‘a free deed that merely presents itself for the faculty of cognition, linked to time, space and causality, in a plurality and diversity of actions’ (FW, 108/SW 4: 97). Something like this idea is also present in Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he says, for example, ‘Pure reason, as a merely intelligible faculty, is not subject to the form of time . . . . The causality of reason in the intelligible character does not arise or start working at a certain time in producing an effect’ (A551/B579); ‘in the intelligible character . . . no before or after applies, and every action . . . is the immediate effect of the intelligible character of pure reason’ (A553/B581); and in his ethical works he talks of a timeless choice of *Gesinnung*, one’s overall disposition or character.<sup>10</sup> This has

<sup>10</sup> See *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Ak 6: 25, in Kant 1996b; *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak 5: 97–100, in Kant 1996a.

led commentators to note at least a superficial similarity with Schopenhauer's statements about the free act outside of time.<sup>11</sup>

Schopenhauer appears to mean that we choose our character, and that we do so once and for all in a single timeless act that leaves us fated with respect to whatever issues temporally from that character. Evidence for this is found in his remark that Plato's myth of Er at the end of the *Republic* is an allegorical expression of the central point concerning intelligible and empirical characters. In the exegesis of the myth in a text by Porphyry that Schopenhauer quotes from,

before they fall into bodies and different life-forms souls have the freedom to choose this or that other life-form, which they then implement through the appropriate life and the body that is suitable to that soul . . . But that freedom is removed as soon as the soul has attained one or other of the life-forms. (BM, 176/SW 4: 179)

Schopenhauer can find only allegory here because he rejects any dualism of soul and body, and indeed has no use for the concept *soul* at all. His point is solely to highlight the contrast of a timeless free choice with the fixedness of character that results from what is chosen.

Schopenhauer states that the myth of Er anticipates Kant's position—which must go down as a questionable interpretation. Some Kantian commentators admit that Kant's words sometimes invite this interpretation, but argue that we do not have to see Kant as saddled with the kind of fatalism Schopenhauer seems to embrace. Two examples: Allen Wood argues that Kant holds with the idea of a single timeless choice of character, but that such a choice does not import the alleged fatalism, because 'we must treat our timeless choice as spontaneously determining each individual act as that act occurs in time. . . . [O]ur timeless choice does not predetermine our actions but has its influence immediately and on each of them' (Wood 1984: 96). So every time I act I am free, because my timeless free choice becomes operative at that time, a choice which can be called a decision as to 'the kind of person I will be, or as Kant puts it in the *Religion*, the "fundamental maxim" on which I will act (*Rel* 31g 26e)' (Wood 1984: 93)—and that is not Schopenhauerian fatalism. Allison suggests that in Kant's case the notion of a timeless choice can be explained as expressing

<sup>11</sup> See Wood 1984: 94; Allison 1990: 139; Allison 2006: 410.

an idea of reason rather than an actual event, psychological, metaphysical, or of any kind. There is no timeless choice of character on this view, just the regulative idea of reason's determining the will by legislating to it according to a chosen fundamental maxim or set of principles.<sup>12</sup> But the larger point for our purposes is that, however it is read, any such idea of timeless choice in Kant must concern the force of *reason* and the rules that the agent takes as those which are to be acted upon—and it is here that the really decisive difference between Kant and Schopenhauer lies.

Kant invokes the intelligible character because he is seeking a distinct sense in which I am a *source* of my action, or have a *power* over my action. The crux of the idea is that reason has a force that is quite other than the causal power to be found in nature. Without this alternative force—marked, albeit inadequately, by the term 'intelligible causality'—the 'activity requirement' cannot be met, and I cannot properly regard myself as an agent. Reason sets a rule for me act on, and in order to act on it I must spontaneously take it to be a rule that has normative force. In Allison's words,

a rational agent is not regarded as being determined in a quasi-mechanistic fashion by the strongest desire (roughly the Leibniz–Hume model). On the contrary, to the extent to which actions are taken as genuine expressions of agency... they are thought to involve an act of spontaneity on the part of the agent, through which the inclination or desire is deemed or taken as an appropriate basis of action.... Moreover,... this occurs by subsuming the inclination or desire under a practical rule or principle. (Allison 1990: 39)

We have seen already how different Schopenhauer's account must be. His picture of rational agency and deliberation is in a relevant sense 'quasi-mechanistic', with empirical character (the agent's will) and occurrent motives determining action. But the intelligible character, whatever it is, is not rational and therefore cannot offer the kind of alternative force Kant seeks to place in it. Indeed, Schopenhauer's intelligible character is designed to root the agent even more firmly within nature, since it counts as his or her real essence, common in kind with the willing and striving that is the essence of everything in nature. The Schopenhauerian intelligible character, therefore, cannot play anything like the role of the Kantian.

<sup>12</sup> See Allison 1990: 47–52; 139–43.

## 5. Why the Intelligible Character?

Having noted some differences between Kant's position and Schopenhauer's, we must question why the latter requires the intelligible character at all. He, like Kant, is also seeking a locus for responsibility or agency. But with reason and motivation already present on the empirical side in his picture, and no clear sense of how the intelligible can exert influence on action, would a better solution not be to situate responsibility or agency in the enduring empirical character, the disposition to end-directed behaviour that is firmly entrenched in nature and, along with occurrent motives, causes all the individual's actions? I would then be responsible for a subspecies of events: those in which the will of the particular human being I am is caused to move by certain cognitive events in the conscious mind I find myself as (as Schopenhauer puts it, WWR 1, 25/SW 2: 5). That might be the basis for an account of my being the doer of my deeds, an account satisfying what we called the 'activity requirement', without any recourse to the timeless or non-empirical. So why would this be inadequate? A simple reconstruction of a Schopenhauerian answer might run as follows:

- (1) Our certain feeling of being doers of our deeds confirms that we are responsible.
- (2) Responsibility attaches only to what is free.
- (3) Freedom is absence of necessitating grounds.
- (4) There can be no absence of necessitating grounds in anything in the empirical realm.

From this we can conclude that a part or aspect of us must be outside the empirical realm. It is as if our very feeling of agency demands that we be more than empirical parts of nature. Schopenhauer takes (3) as definitional of freedom in the only sense that has any proper content. He takes (4) as an *a priori* necessary principle of the understanding. So there would be no convincing him to abandon either of these premises. But (1) and (2) look more vulnerable. Nietzsche's remarks in 'The fable of intelligible freedom', *Human All Too Human* I, 39/KSA 2: 63 attack (1) head on:

Schopenhauer concluded . . . thus: because certain actions bring after them a feeling of *displeasure* ('consciousness of guilt'), there must exist a sense of accountability<sup>13</sup> . . . From the fact of that displeasure Schopenhauer believes

<sup>13</sup> *Verantwortlichkeit*, translated as 'responsibility' in passages from Schopenhauer above.

he can demonstrate a freedom which man must have acquired somehow, not in respect of his actions, but in respect to his nature . . . . Here the erroneous conclusion is drawn that from the fact of a feeling of displeasure there can be inferred the justification, the rational *admissibility* of this feeling of displeasure . . . . But a feeling of displeasure after a deed is absolutely not obliged to be rational; on the contrary, it cannot be, since it rests precisely on the erroneous presupposition that that deed need *not* have taken place with necessity. (HH 1, 39/KSA 2: 63–4)

However, Nietzsche's point seems to trade on (2) (Responsibility attaches only to what is free): for the inference he bars is that from feeling that we are doers to our having responsibility *in the sense of being non-necessitated*. He asserts that we are not responsible precisely on the grounds that our deeds *are* necessitated. This seems to trade on the point raised earlier, that if the phenomenology of willed action is mistaken in presenting us as not necessitated in our actions, then it is *eo ipso* mistaken in presenting us as responsible agents.

However, there is a case for saying that in Schopenhauer's account (2) itself looks vulnerable. Schopenhauer has arguably made ground on two fronts, showing that we cannot attribute our actions to a *liberum arbitrium indiffer-entiae*, and that nonetheless we have an unshakeable sense of agency. (2) looks like an unnecessary obstacle to holding these two claims together. Would he not produce a more consistent account by abandoning the claim that we must be *free* in order to be responsible (assuming still that freedom is absence of necessitating grounds)? Abandoning (2) would obviate the wild goose chase of finding something, somewhere that is 'free'. There is a case, in other words, for saying that Schopenhauer should consistently have abandoned any positive claim that we have freedom, and accepted that we lack freedom, in his sense, not just empirically, but altogether—while retaining his claim that this lack of freedom does not remove our sense of agency.

## 6. The Problem of Individuality

In this final section I want to argue that, even if we grant Schopenhauer the step that if there is responsibility then there must be freedom somewhere in the system, and grant him the further consequence that whatever has this freedom must be something intelligible or non-empirical, there remains the serious problem of how this non-empirical something can coherently be

*individual*. Space and time, as Schopenhauer repeats endlessly, are the *principium individuationis*. The thing in itself is not separable into individuals because it is not subordinate to space and time. But if the intelligible character is the thing in itself that, by virtue of being outside of time and space, cannot be divided into distinct individuals, how can it be just what *this particular individual* is in itself? Individuation should not obtain at the level of the ‘in itself’, where the intelligible character is supposedly located. In a later comment Schopenhauer acknowledges the difficulty, only to concede quietly that he cannot resolve it:

[I]ndividuality does not rest solely on the *principium individuationis* and is not therefore mere *appearance* through and through; instead, it is rooted in the thing in itself, in the will of the individual [*des Einzelnen*], for his character itself is individual. Now how deep these roots go belongs to the questions whose answer I do not attempt here. (PP 2, 206/SW 6: 242)

One recourse available to Schopenhauer lies in his notion of Ideas, which are plural and distinct from one another while also being non-spatiotemporal. In his theory of artistic portraiture Schopenhauer holds that each human individual’s character expresses a unique Idea (see WWR 1, 250/SW 2: 265). But in the context of freedom he does not address this question of non-empirical individuation, and so remains open to the challenge that the individual must be empirical, and the empirical must be necessitated. It would follow not only that the non-necessitated, free locus of responsibility must be non-empirical, but that it must be non-individual. As a result there is at best serious unclarity, at worst total contradiction, in the very idea that the free, non-necessitated inner essence that unfolds itself in my actions should be anything individual at all, that it should be an essence pertaining uniquely to *me*, this human being. Likewise if we put Schopenhauer’s attempted point in terms of the free, extra-temporal act of will, a myth-of-Er-like choice of one’s fixed nature, there is the same difficulty in that act’s being *mine*, if its being mine is supposed to relate, as it surely must for Schopenhauer, to its issuing from one particular human individual.

This difficulty is deepened when Schopenhauer has his full metaphysics in hand, in *The World as Will and Representation*. He then makes a point of stating that ‘genuine freedom, i.e. independence from the principle of sufficient reason, accrues only to the will as thing in itself, not to its appearance’ (WWR 1, 430). But now it becomes clear that it is only the will that is the single inner essence of the world, lying outside of space and time, and hence

not subject to any grounding or necessitation at all, that can really be free. It freely manifests itself in space and time as a multiplicity of individuals and actions, me and mine included. But I, as individual, am not free at all. In the end, all the Schopenhauerian individual can say is ‘If only I had been another’ (see FW, 105/SW 4: 93, quoted above). The individual turns out to be powerless, stuck with responsibility and guilt for the individuality the world has seen fit to express in him or her. And in Schopenhauer’s system individuality per se emerges as a curse and an error from which we need an escape. Death is the ‘great opportunity not to be I any longer’ (WWR 2, 542/SW 3: 582), and only by thus losing the individual does the will regain its true freedom. The values to be found in aesthetic experience, in compassionate action, and in the ‘salvation’ of which this life of suffering allegedly stands in need, all revolve around changes in consciousness which disassociate the subject of experience from its identification with the individual. In his more religious moments Schopenhauer is happy to say that to exist as an individual manifestation of willing is already to bear guilt, a view that he associates with the Christian doctrine of original sin:

because we are what we should *not* be, we necessarily do what we should *not* do . . . Even if guilt lies in actions, in works, the root of the guilt still lies in our essence and existence, since the works proceed necessarily from these, as I have shown in the essay *On the Freedom of the Will*. Thus our only true sin is in fact original sin. (WWR 2, 619/SW 3: 693)

Schopenhauer’s picture of human existence therefore has no room for genuine individual freedom at all. Nature’s fundamental drive to manifest itself in diverse life forms freely wills my individual existence with an essence that reveals itself unmistakably in all my actions. I feel responsible for them because they all issue inescapably from me, bearing my stamp upon them—but *I*, as the individual human being I am, could not have made my fixed and inborn character any different, and, given that I have this character and no other, I could not have acted any differently. Nonetheless the feeling of responsibility, and especially the feeling of guilt, must fall upon me: guilt ultimately for existing as the individual that the world has freely willed me to be, but not a guilt that is owed to any genuine freedom of mine.



# Schopenhauer on the Aimlessness of the Will

## 1. Introduction

In *The World as Will and Representation* Arthur Schopenhauer makes various claims about the relation of suffering and satisfaction of the will, including: (1) that satisfaction is never present without suffering, because satisfaction cannot occur without willing or desiring, which is itself a form of suffering; (2) that no satisfaction is permanent; (3) that suffering is positively felt, while satisfaction is not; (4) that the occurrence of satisfaction never compensates for the occurrence of suffering.<sup>1</sup> While these claims can all be the subject of philosophical contention and interpretive debate, here I want to concentrate on another claim that Schopenhauer offers as ostensibly more fundamental:

Everything that these remarks should clarify, the unattainable nature of lasting satisfaction and the negativity of all happiness, is explained by what we showed at the end of the Second Book: namely that the will, which is objectified in human life as it is in every appearance, is a striving without aim and without end [*ein Streben ohne Ziel und ohne Ende*].

(WWR 1, 347/SW 2: 378)

Here we see that, for Schopenhauer, it is not just that the ends we aim at cannot all be attained at once, nor that the having-attained-an-aim state is impermanent, nor that there exists no positive feeling of having attained one's aim. Rather, in some sense, an aim of willing is lacking altogether. The will is in principle unfulfillable because it lacks any final aim. It is this idea, that 'the will is a striving without aim and without end', that I wish to explore in what follows.

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. WWR 1, 345–6/SW 2: 376–7; WWR 2, 590–2/SW 3: 659–62). Note that quotations from Schopenhauer embedded in passages by other secondary authors retain Payne's translation of *The World as Will and Representation*.

I argue first against a reading of the claim ‘the will is a striving without aim and without end’ suggested by Jordi Fernández. Fernández argues that Schopenhauer means that each of our specific desires lacks an aim, and that he requires this premise in order to support a pessimistic conclusion that suffering is inescapable as long as we have desires. However, I show that this reading is inconsistent with Schopenhauer’s expressed view that every act of will has an object at which it is aimed. When Schopenhauer states that ‘the will is a striving without aim and without end’, he does so in order to argue for the conclusion, not that happiness is unattainable, but rather that happiness, once attained, is never final, in the sense that it never brings an end to the natural, egoistic willing that he associates with the *will to life* that constitutes the human essence. He makes this point in order to contrast happiness, the attainment of willed aims centred on individual well-being, with will-lessness, a state which is truly final, in that such desires no longer arise. Will-lessness is for him a state explicitly superior to happiness.

## 2. Desire as Aimless

In a recent article Jordi Fernández has given a determinate interpretation of Schopenhauer’s claim that the will is a striving without aim and without end. He interprets the claim as the proposition

(AD) Desire is aimless.

As Fernández construes it, if AD is true, then ‘there is no object whose possession will come to stop our willing because, quite simply, there is no object of our willing’ (Fernández 2006: 654–5). Fernández argues that Schopenhauer holds a position which he calls Conditional Pessimism

(CP) As long as desires arise in us, suffering is inescapable,

and on his analysis Schopenhauer must rely on AD as at least an implicit premise in order to support CP. I shall argue that, in the sense in which Fernández construes it, Schopenhauer does not hold AD at all. But first let us look at the role Fernández assigns to it.

In CP suffering is held to be conditional upon the occurrence of desires, or upon episodes of willing, and upon those episodes of willing not being fulfilled. This is not absolute pessimism because it allows that, were it not for desires

arising, we might escape suffering. However, even the conditional inescapability of suffering remains a grave matter for Schopenhauer, since for him willing belongs to the essence of all living things. Desires arise naturally and continually for all of us almost all of the time. So if CP is true, then suffering is inescapable for most of us, most of the time, given our natural condition. This might be a questionable claim if under 'suffering' we thought solely of unremitting pain and inconsolable misery. So there is a further caveat, as Fernández reminds us: 'CP must be read as saying that the presence of some suffering, no matter how brief or mild, is guaranteed' (Fernández 2006: 651). Schopenhauer can, then, allow that in some human lives the satisfaction of desires may be frequent and the dissatisfaction relatively minor. But in that case why is true happiness impossible? Because, as Fernández says, 'Schopenhauer raised the bar for happiness very high', such that 'the constant presence of some unsatisfied desires is enough to guarantee' its absence (651).

CP, therefore, might not seem especially controversial: it says just that all human lives naturally and persistently contain the occurrence of desires, and that consequently some suffering, lasting or brief, severe or mild, will inescapably be present in all human lives. But the question is: How is CP itself supported? Fernández locates two arguments, the 'argument from the lack of satisfaction' and the 'argument from boredom' (646), and according to his analysis AD plays an essential role in both arguments.

We can summarize the argument *from the lack of satisfaction* by using Fernández's own schematic representation (2006: 650, 656):

(D  $\rightarrow$  N) Any desire is generated by a need

(N  $\rightarrow$  P) Any experience of need is painful

From which it follows that:

(D  $\rightarrow$  P) Having desires is painful.

New premise:

(LS) Satisfying all of our desires is impossible

Therefore,

(CP) As long as desires arise in us, suffering is inescapable.

This argument appears valid, provided that we interpret ‘Having desires’ as ‘experiencing unsatisfied desires’. Experiencing unsatisfied desires will always be painful, according to this argument, and of desires that we experience some will always be unsatisfied.

There are many potential queries to be raised about this argument and the individual steps that compose it, not least whether  $D \rightarrow P$  is really credible.<sup>2</sup> However, Fernández focuses attention on one central question concerning the premise LS. Why is it impossible to satisfy all of our desires? He argues that Schopenhauer relies on AD as a suppressed premise:

(AD) Desire is aimless

The import of this is allegedly that ‘[T]here is no object whose possession will come to stop our willing because, quite simply, there is no object of our willing. No wonder, then, that our desires cannot be satisfied once and for all’ (2006: 654–5). Fernández makes it clear that ‘the point in LS [is] meant to be that one cannot permanently satisfy one’s *specific* desires’ (659). Hence AD is supposed to be the view that ‘specific desires’ are aimless: each desire is such that it lacks any aim. On this picture it is not just that the objects of our willing are hard to attain, or that there are too many of them, or that we are inept at identifying them or inept at identifying the means to attaining them—rather, there is no such thing as attaining the objects of our desires, because there are no such things as the objects of our desires. Desire tantalizingly masquerades as a state that aims at an object, but really it has none. As Fernández says, ‘The goals of our desires are not meant to be “only apparent” in that we systematically misidentify them. They are meant to be only apparent in the sense that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as the goals of our desires’ (656).

AD is also required, according to Fernández, as a premise in Schopenhauer’s ‘argument from boredom’ (2006, 656), which has the premises:

( $D \rightarrow P$ ) Having desires is painful.

(SB) Satisfying any of our desires produces boredom in us.

How do we get from this to

(CP) As long as desires arise in us, suffering is inescapable?

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Cartwright 1988: 59; Migotti 1995: 648–50; Janaway 1999: 328–30; Soll 2012: 302–4.

We need to add the assumption that boredom is a form of suffering. But still, why accept SB? Fernández's answer is that SB is also grounded on AD. He explains as follows:

if we get bored once we achieve what we apparently want, it is simply because we did not really want it in the first place.... If we never really wanted a certain object that we pursued and finally secured, then it is not surprising that we are not able to enjoy its possession'. (655)

We need to make a distinction here. If people become bored once they have attained the car, the house, the holiday, and so on, that they were ostensibly yearning for before, then it can be because they discover that they never really wanted *those specific things*. But Fernández has Schopenhauer making a different point: that people become bored whatever they attain, because prior to attaining it they were wanting and yearning, and so experiencing a sense of lack (and hence suffering)—yet, strictly speaking, there was *nothing* they wanted or yearned for. Their desires were aimed at no object. Similarly, reverting to the earlier 'lack of satisfaction' argument, if I am ostensibly yearning for a car, a house, and a holiday, it is guaranteed that this yearning can never be satisfied, because, again, I am just yearning, but not genuinely *for* anything. So anything I happen to get could not be the object of my yearning, which would explain why there can be no felt satisfaction relative to any desire.

Now Fernández is critical of AD, and rightly so, since it is a singular oddity. Although human beings are prone to be wrong or self-deceived about what they desire, and to fall prey to ill-focused longings and senses of dissatisfaction with their condition in general that may not encompass any identifiable aim, it seems misguided to take something like AD as a starting assumption about desires as such. At least an intuitive starting-point for thinking about states of desiring, wanting, willing, yearning, and so on, is that they take an intentional object, that desire is desire *for* ... or desire *that* .... Closer to home for present purposes is the charge Fernández makes, that the assumption of AD renders Schopenhauer's own overall position inconsistent, because it conflicts with  $(D \rightarrow N)$  'Any desire is generated by a need'. Schopenhauer's version of this premise is 'All *willing* springs from need, and thus from lack, and thus from suffering', or 'the basis of all willing is need, lack, and thus pain, which is its primordial destiny by virtue of its essence' (WWR 1, 219/SW 2: 231; WWR 1, 338/SW 2: 367). Fernández argues that, if it is to be intelligible, this premise must be construed as saying that 'desires are aimed at the elimination of those needs that generate them' (657). But, thus construed,  $(D \rightarrow N)$  says that

desires have aims, contradicting AD. Fernández's advice is that Schopenhauer 'would be better off dropping the view that desire is aimless' (654). However, I shall argue that Schopenhauer cannot drop the view that desire is aimless (as so far construed) because he does not hold it in the first place.

### 3. Acts of Will Have Aims

In this section I shall argue that the evidence Fernández offers for the claim that Schopenhauer holds AD does not support that claim. Fernández (2006, 655) cites the following passages:<sup>3</sup>

- (i) In fact, absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will in itself, which is an endless striving.... Therefore, the striving of matter can always be impeded only, never fulfilled or satisfied. But this is precisely the case with the striving of all the will's phenomena (WWR 1 (Payne), 164/SW 2: 195).
- (ii) We clearly saw how, at all grades of its phenomenon from the lowest to the highest, the will dispenses entirely with an ultimate object aim and object. It always strives, because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained goal can put an end. Such striving is therefore incapable of final satisfaction (WWR 1 (Payne), 308/SW 2: 364).
- (iii) All that these remarks are intended to make clear, namely the impossibility of attaining lasting satisfaction and the negative nature of all happiness, finds its explanation in what is shown at the end of the second book, namely that the will, whose objectification is human life like every other phenomenon, is a striving without aim or end (WWR 1 (Payne), 321/SW 2: 378).

My claim is that none of these passages gives evidence of Schopenhauer's supporting AD, the claim that particular desires lack any aim. In (i) Fernández omits some sentences from the text, one of which states that the gravitation of matter is a 'constant striving... although a final goal for it is obviously impossible'. The emphasis is on the lack of a *final* goal (*letztes Ziel*). Then immediately following the passage Schopenhauer adds the sentence (again not quoted by Fernández), 'Every attained end (*jedes erreichte Ziel*) is at the same time the beginning of a new course, and so on *ad infinitum*.' Hence the point

<sup>3</sup> Here I retain the Payne translation of these extracts, as used by Fernández.

of the passage is to make a contrast: particular cases of striving have ends, goals, or aims, which are capable of attainment, but there is no *final* end of striving as such. Schopenhauer makes the contrast explicit towards the end of the same paragraph, in a sentence that Fernández cites later (2006: 658): ‘Every individual act has a purpose or end; willing as a whole has no end in view’ (*jeder einzelne Akt hat einen Zweck; das gesamte Wollen keinen*). Fernández suggests that this sentence is in conflict with the longer extract just examined. But there is no conflict here: the longer extract belongs to a passage in which the same contrast—between the aims or goals of particular acts and the aimlessness of willing as such (‘willing as a whole’, ‘the will’)—is manifest.

Passage (ii) places the same emphasis on the will’s dispensing entirely with an *ultimate* aim and object (*eines letzten Zieles und Zweckes*), but in the same breath says that ‘no attained goal can put an end’ (*kein erreichtes Ziel ein Ende macht*) to the striving which is the will’s nature. This implies that there are goals to be attained. The passage ends with a restatement of the impossibility of the will’s *final* satisfaction (*endliche Befriedigung*). So once again there are goals at which episodes of willing aim, and which can indeed be attained, but there is no possibility of a final goal of ‘willing as a whole’. Passage (iii) repeats the claim that no *lasting* satisfaction is possible because the will is a striving without aim (*Ziel*) or end (*Ende*). But from this it cannot be inferred that no particular desire has an aim, nor that Schopenhauer has inexplicably abandoned the contrast he consistently presents elsewhere. So I submit that these passages provide no genuine evidence that Schopenhauer supports AD, ‘Desire is aimless’, at least in the sense Fernández requires for his interpretation.

There is more positive evidence against Fernández’s reading too. That particular desires or episodes of willing have objects is a cornerstone of Schopenhauer’s positive theory of willing and action. In his essay on freedom he says:

If a human being *wills*, then he wills something: his act of will is in every case directed towards an object [*Gegenstand*] and can be conceived only in relation to one. So what does it mean to will? It means: the act of will, which itself is at first only an object of self-consciousness, arises on the occasion of something that belongs to consciousness of *other things*, thus something that is an object [*Objekt*] for the cognitive faculty, an object that, in this relation, is called a *motive* and at the same time is the material of the act of will, in the sense that the act of will is directed towards it, i.e. aims at some alteration in it, or reacts to it. The whole being of the act of will consists in this reaction. Already from this

it is clear that without the object the act of will could not occur; for it would lack both occasion and material. (FW, 40/SW 4: 14)

So having an aim is constitutive of acts of will: there *could* not be an act of will, or episode of willing, that was aimless. Each episode of willing must have ‘material’ or content: what it means to will is to act with an aim relative to some object of one’s experience, where the occurrence of the experience of the object functions also as the cause of the action. Thus AD, if taken to mean ‘each of our particular desires is aimless’, is not only false, but unintelligible for Schopenhauer. His ‘the will is a striving without aim and without end’ requires interpreting in some other way.

#### 4. ‘The Will’ as Aimless

As we have seen, while particular desires must have aims for Schopenhauer, ‘the will’ or ‘willing as a whole’ is said to be characterized by aimlessness. One way of rendering these claims consistent is in terms of a distinction between ‘will’ understood empirically and ‘will’ understood transcendently. Such a reading is given clear expression by Mark Migotti, who suggests that in order to avoid contradiction, a metaphysical split between ‘will’ and ‘Will’ is essential:

Schopenhauer’s theory of willing . . . requires a distinction between *empirical* willing, engaged in by spatio-temporally located subjects of will, and transcendental willing, engaged in by the metaphysically ultimate and non-spatio-temporal subject of will, the Will itself, which is the essence of all things in Schopenhauer’s system. The need for a distinction of this sort . . . can be seen by juxtaposing the following two claims . . . :

1. Every will<sub>[e]</sub> is directed to something; it has an object, an aim of its willing (WWR 1, § 29, 163)
2. In fact absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will<sub>[t]</sub> in itself, which is endless striving (ibid., 164)

Unless we distinguish between two orders or levels of willing . . . these statements flatly contradict one another’. (Migotti 1995: 647)

From Fernández’s point of view, however, this interpretive move of denying any aim merely to this ‘metaphysically ultimate’ will, as opposed to particular desires, is unhelpful to Schopenhauer’s case for pessimism. Whatever may be



true at the transcendental level, as long as particular desires have aims (i.e. as long as AD is removed), conditional pessimism (CP) will remain unsupported. Thus Fernández says:

The claim that The Will is aimless seems irrelevant . . . . The point in LS was meant to be that one cannot permanently satisfy one's specific desires. If we grant that those desires have goals, then it is difficult to see why the fact that The Will is aimless should prevent us from being able to achieve all of those goals. (2006: 659)

An additional concern is whether Schopenhauer's utterances to the effect that *the will* is aimless always make reference exclusively to what is here called 'the Will'. By this capitalized usage 'the Will', English-language commentators generally mean to refer to the Schopenhauerian thing in itself, the undivided metaphysical essence that Schopenhauer equates with the world as such. It is a questionable usage, however. Schopenhauer himself, writing in German where every substantive must have a capital letter, never makes an orthographical distinction between 'will' and 'Will', so to introduce capitalization in English is already to push interpretation of the mere phrase 'the will' (*der Wille*) in a definite direction which it may not merit in all contexts.<sup>4</sup> There certainly are contexts in which *der Wille* can only be read as referring to the metaphysical thing in itself, for instance the passage at the end of the Second Book of *The World as Will and Representation* where Schopenhauer writes

The will *that is presented to us as the essence in itself of the world*: what does it ultimately will, or what does it strive for? . . . In fact the absence of all goals . . . belongs to the essence of the will in itself, which is an endless striving.  
(WWR 1, 188/SW 2: 195, emphasis added)

However, the same reading may not apply across the board whenever Schopenhauer writes *der Wille*. Context alone will determine whether he refers to the thing in itself, the will of an individual empirical being, a particular desire of an empirical being, all the particular desires of all empirical beings, or indeed more than one of these alternatives at once.

<sup>4</sup> Apparent inattention to this point has led one commentator (Hannan 2009: 12) to the remarkable statement that 'Schopenhauer himself does not always consistently follow this convention'—i.e. that of distinguishing between 'will' and 'Will', a convention which he could not have had.

It is important to understand that, for Schopenhauer, there is a sense in which the aimlessness of the will as thing in itself is also transferred to its empirical manifestations. Human agents are empirical manifestations of the will. So indeed is every other natural phenomenon, but since our topic is the unattainability of human satisfaction and the negativity of human happiness, other natural manifestations of will need not be considered here. Every individual that is an empirical manifestation of the metaphysical will shares (at least qualitatively) the same essence: ‘what he recognizes as his own essence is the same thing that constitutes the essence of the world in its entirety’ (WWR 1, 187/SW 2 193). In the case of an animal or human being ‘willing and striving constitute their entire essence [*sein ganzes Wesen*]’ (WWR 1, 338/SW 2: 367). And the crucial point is that whatever shares this essence shares the same absence of aim. In other words, the essence of every individual empirical being that manifests will is endless striving that has no final aim. All three passages adduced by Fernández above state exactly this (with my emphases): ‘[not just in itself, but] at all grades of its phenomenon [or appearance, *Erscheinung*] from the lowest to the highest, the will dispenses entirely with an ultimate aim and object’; ‘this is precisely the case with the striving of all the will’s phenomena’; ‘the will, whose objectification is human life like every other phenomenon, is a striving without aim’ (emphasis added). So we cannot shunt the claim of aimlessness off into the transcendental realm, because it applies equally to every empirical being that manifests will, and in particular to human life.

To put the issue in proper context, we must acknowledge Schopenhauer’s central conception of will to life (*Wille zum Leben*). He says that ‘it . . . amounts to the same thing if, instead of simply saying “the will”, we say “the will to life”’ (WWR 1, 301/SW 2: 324). So when he states that willing and striving constitute my entire essence, what he intends more narrowly is that, as a spatio-temporal, individuated, living part of nature that manifests will, I am naturally disposed to pursue ends that centre on this one individual. Put in other words,

The chief and fundamental incentive in a human being, as in an animal, is *egoism*, i.e. the urge to existence and well-being. . . . This *egoism*, both in an animal and in a human being, is linked in the most precise way with his innermost core and essence, and indeed is properly identical with it; . . . the human being unconditionally wills to preserve his existence, wills it unconditionally free from pains, . . . wills every pleasure of which he is capable. (BM, 190/SW 4: 196–7)

If this is my individual essence, and if the will as objectified in a human individual 'dispenses entirely with an ultimate aim and object', then Schopenhauer should hold that this absence of aim and object holds of my natural striving after egoistic ends.

One issue this might be thought to raise is what we might term the existential question: 'Why do we will at all? Is there an overall aim or purpose served by the fact of our willing existence, pleasure and well-being in the first place?' Human beings generally have no answer to this question, in Schopenhauer's view: 'every human being...when asked why he wills in general [*überhaupt*], or why in general he wills to exist...would not have an answer and in fact the question would make no sense to him' (WWR 1, 188/SW 2: 194–5). The explanation is that we will in the first place, not in order to fulfil some aim, but because we are, as it were, thrown into willing, because it is our essence so to do. However, this existential point is orthogonal to the question whether all our particular desires can be fulfilled. Even supposing that each of my desires and actions has an aim, and that those aims might all be achieved—if in the course of my life I had, again and again, satisfied my particular desires for food, sex, enjoyment, money, recognition, and so on—there may still be no answer to the existential question. And by the same token, the unanswerability of that question does not in itself give us reason to think that our individual desires could not in principle be fulfilled. So Fernández's point reasserts itself. If the premise AD is not held, and we thereby concede aims to particular desires, there seems no reason to conclude that (CP) 'As long as desires arise in us, suffering is inescapable.'

At this point we need to take a different tack, and question whether CP is indeed the conclusion that Schopenhauer wishes to support with his claim that the will is aimless. Recall that in the passages examined above Schopenhauer was committed not only to individual desires having aims, but also to there being no *final* aim of willing as such. Similarly, when Schopenhauer says 'the will is a striving without aim and without end', 'end' here translates *Ende*, and is not merely a paraphrase of 'aim' (*Ziel*). To say that the will has no *Ende* is to say that its activity does not come to a stop. In one sense this is obviously false: in the case of each human individual, their willing of course comes to an end in temporal terms. We all have what is in fact our last wish, and Schopenhauer cannot mean to deny this inescapable truth when he says that the will is a striving without end. However, the notions of 'no aim' and 'no end' need not be understood as making separate claims here. Rather, I shall argue, Schopenhauer means that in relation to the will to life there is no aim we can strive for whose attainment has the power to end willing. The point here is

not that desires fail to have their aims fulfilled, or that temporary happiness is not sometimes attained. It is rather that no matter how much we fulfil the aims of our desires, there is no *final* aim, meaning no aim that has the power to bring about a state of will-lessness, a state in which the individual ceases to be disposed towards further striving. The ‘negativity of happiness’ to which Schopenhauer refers is not its unattainability, but its comparative worthlessness. Happiness itself is deficient because it does not bring willing to a stop.

## 5. An End to Willing

Will-lessness is, for Schopenhauer, a possible state that is positively transformative of the human condition. Will-lessness is the sole state of ‘true salvation [*Heil*], redemption [*Erlösung*] from life and from suffering’ (WWR 1, 424/SW 2: 470). Schopenhauer also frequently describes this will-less state as the ‘final goal’ of existence, or as the one and only condition that has ‘final value’.<sup>5</sup> Will-lessness, for Schopenhauer, arises from what he calls the will’s denial (or negation, *Verneinung*) of itself. Will-lessness thus stands in fundamental *opposition* to happiness. Happiness is the attainment of what the will strives for: ‘When an obstacle is placed between [the will] and its temporary goal, we call this inhibition suffering; on the other hand, the achievement of its goal is satisfaction, well-being, happiness [*Glück*],’ (WWR 1, 336/SW 2: 365). The redemptive state, by contrast, results from the will’s ‘self-abolition’, its absence of striving. Crucial though this opposition is, it can easily be missed, as in this summary by Bernard Reginster:

Schopenhauer ostensibly defines happiness in terms of desire satisfaction: happiness is ‘a final satisfaction of the will, after which no fresh willing would occur, [...] an imperishable satisfaction of the will [*eine finale Befriedigung des Willens, nach welcher kein neues Wollen einträte, [...] ein unzerstörbares Genügen des Willens*],’ or a ‘contentment that cannot be disturbed [*Zufriedenheit [...], die nicht wieder zerstört werden kann*].’ (Reginster 2006: 108)

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., letter to Johann August Becker 10. December 1844 (GB, 220); WWR 2, 623/SW 3: 698; PP 2, 279/SW 6: 328.

The excerpt quoted here from Volume 1 of *The World as Will and Representation*<sup>6</sup> may initially read as though the ‘satisfaction’ and the ‘contentment’ that Schopenhauer mentions are the same thing, especially since the latter translates *Zufriedenheit* and the former, in its first occurrence, translates the cognate *Befriedigung*. But, when read fully, the passage makes a stark contrast: the *Zufriedenheit* (contentment) it mentions is a *possible* and highly valuable state; but the *finale Befriedigung* (final satisfaction) is an *impossible* one:

*Absolute good* is thus a contradiction: highest good or *summum bonum* mean the same thing, denoting properly a final satisfaction for the will, following which there will be no new willing.... But... such a thing is unthinkable.... The will can have no lasting fulfilment that gives perfect and permanent satisfaction to its strivings.... But... we might by way of a trope and figuratively call the complete self-abolition and negation of the will, the true absence of the will, ... the only thing that can give that contentment that can never again be disturbed, the only thing that can redeem the world... —we might call this the absolute good, the *summum bonum*.

(WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 428, translation modified)

‘Contentment [*Zufriedenheit*] that can never again be disturbed’ applies to a state that can redeem the world, but ‘final satisfaction [*Befriedigung*]’ applies to something that is impossible, a contradiction. So at the very least these expressions cannot be co-referential.

Schopenhauer makes this contrast explicit and salient, saying of the ‘complete self-abolition and negation of the will’: ‘we can look upon it as the one radical cure for the disease against which all other goods—such as fulfilled wishes and achieved happiness—are only palliatives, only anodynes’ (WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 428). Note that there is achieved happiness in life (we attain the aims of some of our desires)—but it is not the cure that life requires because that cure can be provided only by the absence of will. Happiness (*Glück*, *Glücksäligkeit*) is equated with *Befriedigung*, ‘satisfaction’, and sometimes with *Wohlseyn* (‘well-being’).<sup>7</sup> Negation of the will is a state not of the satisfaction of desires, but of renunciation (*Entsagung*) or resignation (*Resignation*) from desires (WWR 1, 406/SW 2: 448), and it is to this that

<sup>6</sup> Reginster quotes from Payne’s translation, WWR 1 (Payne), 362, and all the bracketing is his. The same passage is quoted more fully from the Cambridge translation immediately below.

<sup>7</sup> See WWR 1, 336, 345, 389/SW 2: 365, 376, 427.

Schopenhauer applies the term *Zufriedenheit*, along with other terms that are translated as blissfulness, peace, rest, cheerfulness, elevation, and composure.<sup>8</sup> Thus the central contrast in Schopenhauer's philosophy of value is between happiness and will-lessness. Happiness is not a route to salvation, because no effort of striving to satisfy the will is sufficient to bring about will-lessness. So, even if Fernández's CP were false, and we could achieve all our desires, we would not have reached the state of *final* value, that of not willing at all.

In many obvious cases where an object of desire is attained, desire for the same object resurfaces. Eating food satisfies my occurrent desire for food now, but satisfying that desire does not bring it about that I desire no more food, because, whether or not my desire for food now is satisfied, I still retain the disposition to desire food. In other cases a desire for some specific object may abate once attained: my satisfying a desire to ride on the back of an elephant or go sky-diving might completely obliterate any desire ever to repeat such an activities. But satisfying such a desire obviously does not remove my proneness to desire other particular objects in general. Schopenhauer's really rather simple point is that nothing ever attained as the object of any particular desire would have the power to do that. We might put it this way:

(A) When any desire of an individual human being *S* attains its object at time *t*, then *S* is naturally disposed to have some desire, for some object, that is unsatisfied either at *t* or soon after *t*.

An obvious objection to (A) is that one's desire might be to terminate one's very existence, or at least one's capacity for conscious experience. On *that* desire's attaining its object, one would have terminated one's disposition to form new, unfulfilled desires. So (A) applies only to cases in which the individual continues to exist beyond *t* as a subject of consciousness. To make this explicit we can amend (A) to:

(A\*) When any desire of an individual human being *S* attains its object at time *t*, and *S* is a subject of consciousness after *t*, *S* is naturally disposed to have some desire, for some object, that is unsatisfied either at *t* or soon after *t*.

(A\*) is arguably true, or at least is not obviously false. Assuming that I continue to exist as a subject of consciousness, however many specific aims of my specific desires I manage to attain, none is a *final* aim, in the sense that

<sup>8</sup> For examples see WWR 1, 401, 406, 417, 419/SW 2: 442, 448, 461, 464.

none terminates my 'willing as a whole', none turns me into a non-willing being. It is this that Schopenhauer offers in explanation of 'the impossibility of lasting satisfaction and the negative nature of all happiness'.

## 6. Some Difficulties

It is not clear whether Schopenhauer's position is coherent. First, it may be objected that Schopenhauer has after all provided the will with a final aim: namely will-lessness itself. This is the state that has 'final value', and as such is at least something *desirable*, something we should desire. It is not only the 'ultimate goal' of existence, but also, as he explicitly says elsewhere, a state for which 'we cannot help feeling the greatest longing, since we acknowledge that this alone is . . . infinitely superior to everything else' (WWR 1, 417/SW 2: 461). If we long for will-lessness, it is surely the aim of one of our desires. And if we reached that aim, our doing so would provide a counter-example to (A\*). Schopenhauer says that will-lessness is the ultimate state that puts an end to willing. If we desire this end, it is hard not to conceive it as the *final* aim of the will, in the sense canvassed above.

Running somewhat counter to this suggestion is Schopenhauer's idea that the redemptive state of will-lessness is not arrived at by an act of the individual's will: 'negation of the will . . . cannot be forced by any intention or resolution, but . . . arrives suddenly, as if flying in from outside' (WWR 1, 432/SW 2: 478). He compares it even to the arrival of divine grace, as theorized by Luther in particular. Although there is, for Schopenhauer, literally nothing divine to serve as the source from which 'grace' can emanate, the point he makes via this analogy is that our own individual human efforts of will are not sufficient to bring us salvation. We do not attain salvation simply by striving after it, but must await a kind of conversion experience. In another passage, however, Schopenhauer makes it clear that will-lessness is something that does have to be striven for:

the peace and blissfulness we have described in the lives of saintly people is only a flower that emerges from the constant overcoming of the will, and we see the constant struggle with the will to life as the soil from which it arises; . . . Thus we also see people who have succeeded at some point in negating the will bend all their might to hold to this path by wresting renunciations of every sort from themselves, by adopting a difficult, penitent way of life and seeking out everything they find unpleasant: anything in

order to subdue the will that will always strive anew. . . . I have often used the expression *asceticism*, and I understand by it, in the narrow sense, this *deliberate* [*vorsätzliche*] breaking of the will. (WWR 1, 418–19/SW 2: 463)

Here it seems plain that the peace of not willing is something that is *willed*. This passage also shows that attaining the state of ‘peace and blissfulness’ does not after all leave the subject empty of *all* desires. In that case, Schopenhauer’s invocation of ‘true’ or ‘complete’ will-lessness<sup>9</sup> must be treated as hyperbole.

Schopenhauer’s theory therefore seems beset by two problems: (1) that there is a final aim of the will, despite his assertions to the contrary, and (2) that the alleged final aim of the will is not really final, that is to say, it is a not state in which all willing has come to a stop. One way in which these problems can perhaps be mitigated is to introduce a distinction between two kinds of will or desire. Schopenhauer never clearly makes this distinction. He appears to have only one conception of will, equating ‘will’ with ‘will to life’. Nevertheless, when he says of people who have achieved the blissfulness of not willing that they desire to stay in that state, and must struggle to preserve it, he attributes to them a desire that clearly stands in opposition to the will to life (WWR 1, 418–19/SW 2: 463). So it looks as though he should acknowledge a kind of desire or will that is *not* a manifestation of the will to life. Supposing there are such desires, then if by ‘absence of will’ Schopenhauer all along means ‘absence of will to life’, but not absence of *all* desire, his position gains in coherence, at least to the extent of removing our problem (2). Desires have not come to a stop in the state that is the ‘final purpose’, but the will to life has.

As for the first problem, the same kind of disambiguation may be suggested. If Schopenhauer’s claim that the will lacks a final aim and end is restricted to the will to life, then it need not stand in conflict with the claim that we desire a state of will-less bliss as our highest goal. While the will to life aims at the well-being or pleasure of the individual human being and is essentially egoistic, the self-negation of the will is precisely its turning away from life, disdaining the satisfaction and well-being of the individual. The resulting state of will-lessness puts a stop to this kind of natural, egoistic willing. But will-lessness is not an aim of natural, egoistic willing, not an aim that satisfies our individual, essentially egoistic desires. A fortiori, will-lessness is not the final aim of the will to life. This interpretation is consonant with the distinction between happiness and salvation discussed above. If the happiness that occurs in life is

<sup>9</sup> See WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 428 (*wahre Willenslosigkeit*); WWR 1, 406/SW 2: 448 (*gänzliche Willenslosigkeit*).



always conceived as being the satisfaction of desires centred on an individual's well-being, then there is no *final* happiness. This is because no individually-centred desire is such that satisfying it ends individually centred desiring altogether. What is final, however, is a state of salvation in which one is free of *this kind* of desiring altogether.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, to summarize, I have argued that when Schopenhauer states that the will dispenses with a final aim, he does not merely mean that the metaphysical thing in itself has no aim, nor does he mean that a human being's specific desires have no aim. He means that no fulfilled aim of our natural, egoistic desire is final, in the sense of putting an end to that kind of willing as such. So the aimlessness of the will is meant to explain not the unattainability of happiness, but the unsatisfactoriness of the only kind of happiness we can and do attain. Its unsatisfactoriness is its lack of finality. Admittedly, Schopenhauer's exposition fails systemically to distinguish between the kind of desire that belongs to the will to life and the kind of desire that opposes it and longs for salvation from it. But I have argued that this distinction is implicit in his discussion, and that it can help to restore coherence to his message. Schopenhauer contrasts two routes: the route of happiness and the route of salvation. When happiness occurs, it is the fulfilment of desires that have to do with the well-being or satisfaction of the individual living being whose essence is will to life. The will to life manifests itself in each individual as a succession of desires, all of which are aimed at specific objects. We saw that an act of will without an aim is an impossibility for Schopenhauer. But whatever satisfaction of its desires this will to life attains in one of its individual empirical manifestations, for it there can never be a 'final goal or end'. None of its satisfactions is such as to stop active desires for more satisfactions: happiness attained never stops us striving for more objects of desire. The only state that is free of suffering is 'absence of will'. This is admittedly the most desirable state, and is a state that we desire, but it is not the final goal of the will to life. It is not attainable by any effort of striving towards the individual's well-being and satisfaction. So, to return to the question from which we started, 'the unattainable nature of lasting satisfaction and the negativity of all happiness' is explained by the claim that 'the will is a striving without aim and without end'

in the following sense. Attainable happiness is the satisfaction of desires relating to individual well-being, but no act of will that succeeds in satisfying such desires is the attainment of a *final* aim, in that none brings about a conscious state in which the subject experiences no more such desires. Will-lessness is the ultimate goal of existence, in Schopenhauer's view, but happiness does not provide a route along which it can be attained.

# What's So Good about Negation of the Will?

## Schopenhauer and the Problem of the *summum bonum*

### 1. Introduction

The final part of Schopenhauer's argument in *The World as Will and Representation* concerns 'affirmation and negation of the will' (*Bejahung und Verneinung des Willens*). He argues, with a fervour that borders on the religious, that 'negation of the will' is a condition of unique value, the only state that enables 'true salvation, redemption from life and from suffering' (WWR 1, 424/SW 2: 470). Some commentators have asserted without qualification that this condition is his 'highest good'. Thus Julian Young writes: '[T]he final goal of "salvation" ... which Schopenhauer describes as the "*summum bonum*", "the highest good" ... consists in something he calls "denial of the will."' <sup>1</sup> Similarly, John Atwell states: 'Salvation may be called the "telos of human life," or even the highest good (*summum bonum*), understood as that without which human life would be devoid of any redeeming feature.' <sup>2</sup> Robert Solomon includes Schopenhauer in a long list of philosophers who have 'defended some variation of "peace of mind" or "tranquility" ... as the highest good'; <sup>3</sup> Bernard Reginster locates in Schopenhauer 'the highest good (happiness) as the absence of pain and suffering, which he believes can only be achieved through resignation'. <sup>4</sup> Daniel Came finds a 'soteriological vision of the *summum bonum* which is in principle attainable for human beings'. <sup>5</sup>

However, these assertions are all questionable in one important respect, for Schopenhauer states that there *cannot be* a highest good or *summum bonum*, saying 'such a thing is unthinkable' (WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 428). True, he does immediately add in the same passage that 'we might ... *by way of a trope and*

<sup>1</sup> Young 200: 188 (and see also 196). Young uses 'denial' for *Verneinung*, following the well-established usage found in the translations by E. F. J. Payne. I use 'negation' for *Verneinung*.

<sup>2</sup> Atwell 1995: 184. <sup>3</sup> Solomon 1998: 92.

<sup>4</sup> Reginster 2006: 12. In section 2 below, we shall see that negation of the will is quite distinct from 'happiness' in Schopenhauer's view.

<sup>5</sup> Came 2011: 259.

*figuratively* [my emphasis] call the complete self-abolition and negation of the will the *summum bonum*.' But still he maintains that nothing can be the highest good *literally*. Schopenhauer himself seems tempted to say that negation of the will is the highest good, but unable to assert as much directly. In this essay I explore the reasons behind Schopenhauer's ambivalence, and ask what account of the value of his uniquely redemptive state the resources of his philosophy really allow him to give. I shall argue that a better statement of Schopenhauer's position would indeed be that negation of the will *is* the highest good, but that his ambivalence over the applicability of the term 'highest good' should not be viewed as a mere quibble or lapse of confidence, rather as revealing something of structural importance in his thought. Schopenhauer has a univocal definition of *good* as whatever is conducive to the will. But—so I shall argue—he recognizes two distinct *ways of being good*, corresponding to two kinds of *willing*. The first is what I shall call ordinary individualistic willing: willing whose aim is the well-being of individuals or the alleviation of individuals' suffering, which includes both egoistic willing and the moral attitude of willing the well-being of other individuals for its own sake. The second is a will to be without ordinary individualistic willing. Schopenhauer explicitly theorizes only the first of these two kinds of willing, but I shall argue that the coherence of his thought depends upon there being something like the second kind, and that there is evidence for his recognizing it. With this dichotomy in place, he can hold that negation of the will is the highest good, while also making clear that it is not the highest of the goods attainable by ordinary individualistic willing. It remains unclear, however, whether Schopenhauer's metaphysics is ultimately able to sustain the distinction he needs between the two kinds of willing.

## 2. Negation of the Will to Life

According to Schopenhauer, 'the whole essence of a human being is will' (WWR 1, 315/SW 2: 341). This is also the essence common to all living things. To exist as a living individual of any kind is to strive after ends that are to do with the individual's well-being, and also with the preservation of its species. It is this natural disposition to strive after ends that Schopenhauer calls 'will to life' (*Wille zum Leben*). He tends to talk interchangeably of 'will' and 'will to life', and states that 'it is a mere pleonasm and amounts to the same thing if, instead of simply saying "the will", we say "the will to life"' (WWR 1, 301/SW 2: 324). The natural state of all living things is one of affirmation of this will to

life: 'The affirmation [Bejahung] of the will is the constant willing itself... as it fills the life of human beings in general' (WWR 1, 353/SW 2: 385). But Schopenhauer argues that negation of the will to life, attainable only relatively rarely by human beings, is the superior condition.

It is hard to capture the meaning of term 'negation of the will to life' (*Verneinung des Willens zum Leben*) in a single coherent statement. Matthias Koßler has recently summarized at least part of the problem for the interpreter. Within a single section of Schopenhauer's discussion in *The World as Will and Representation* (§ 68) the expression *Verneinung des Willens zum Leben* applies to (a) a state of 'true composure' that arises when all willing is quietened by a remarkable kind of knowledge or recognition (in which someone 'recognizes himself, his innermost and true self in all beings' and 'must... regard the endless suffering of all living things as his own', (WWR 1, 405/SW 2: 447)); (b) this very knowledge or recognition itself; (c) an ascetic practice of striving or struggling against one's own will. Koßler concludes that *Verneinung des Willens zum Leben* is not a unitary phenomenon or a unitary philosophical concept.<sup>6</sup>

However, the following is a summary of at least some of the central points that emerge from Schopenhauer's account:

1. The state of 'composure' in which this negation culminates is a state of will-lessness or absence of will (*Willenslosigkeit*, see e.g. WWR 1, 389, 406/SW 2: 428, 448). Will is characterized as including episodes of desiring and striving toward ends, and affective states that result from the attainment or non-attainment of ends. (Will encompasses, besides desires, also 'inclinations, passions, affects [*Neigungen, Leidenschaften, Affekte*]' (WWR 2, 224/SW 3: 236)). In 'will-lessness', all such states are conceived as absent from a subject's consciousness. Cognition occurs, but 'known appearances no longer act as *motives* for willing' (WWR 1, 311/SW 2: 336).
2. It is a state in which the sense of self alters, so that one is aware of being a 'pure, will-less subject of cognition' (cf. WWR 1, 390/SW 2: 429) or a centre of consciousness, but does not regard oneself as an individual

<sup>6</sup> 'Den § 68 zusammenfassend läßt sich festhalten, daß es sich bei der in ihm thematisierten "Verneinung des Willens zum Leben" weder um ein einheitliches Phänomen noch um ein einheitliches philosophisches Konzept handelt. Sie bezeichnet einmal den Zustand der 'wahren Gelassenheit', der aus der Erkenntnis als einem 'Quietiv alles und jeden Wollens' hervorgeht...; sie ist einmal die Erkenntnis selbst...; und sie bezeichnet auch die asketische Praxis, den (willentlichen) Kampf gegen das eigene Wollen' (Koßler 2014: 175).

entity distinguishable from other entities: 'a secret presentiment... makes him suspect that, to whatever extent time and space might present him as completely distinct from other individuals... and present these as entirely foreign to him, nonetheless, in himself and apart from representation and the forms of representation, it is one will to life that appears in them all' (WWR 1, 392/SW 2: 431–2).

3. A human being may make a transition to the state of recognition and its resulting will-lessness, in one of two circumstances: (a) if she comes to 'see through the principle of individuation' and regard the suffering and well-being of all individuals as mattering to her in the same way as the suffering and well-being of the individual human being she has naturally identified herself with; (b) if she undergoes suffering of sufficient magnitude to transform her state to one of resignation. Schopenhauer explains that the difference between (a) and (b) is 'whether this recognition is called into existence by suffering that is merely and purely *cognized*, and which is freely approached by our seeing through the *principium individuationis*, or whether, on the other hand, recognition comes from one's own immediate *feeling* of suffering' (WWR 1, 424/SW 2: 470).
4. The transition into the state of will-lessness is not one that someone can bring about in herself intentionally by an act of will, but rather one that she undergoes, experiencing it as 'the *self-abolition* [*Selbstaufhebung*] of the will' (WWR 1, 432/SW 2: 478); so 'negation of the will... cannot be forced by any intention or resolution, but... arrives suddenly, as if flying in from outside' (WWR 1, 432/SW 2: 478).

Many questions can be raised concerning the coherence and plausibility of Schopenhauer's claims about negation of the will. In this essay I want to pursue one question in particular: What is the nature of the *value* that he attributes to this condition?

One point to clarify straight away is that Schopenhauer makes a fundamental distinction between negation of the will and 'happiness'. 'Happiness' is the satisfaction of the desires that are natural to an individual human being by virtue of the individual's embodying the will to life. His terms most naturally translated as 'happiness' are *Glück* and *Glücksäligkeit*. *Glück* is equated with *Befriedigung*, 'satisfaction', and sometimes with *Wohlseyn* ('well-being').<sup>7</sup> Thus he says 'the will of human beings is directed only towards its own well-being

<sup>7</sup> See WWR 1, 336, 345, 389/SW 2: 365, 376, 427.

[*Wohlseyn*], the sum of which we think of under the concept of *happiness* [*Glücksäligkeit*]' (BM 120/SW 4: 113). It is a basic natural characteristic of any individual living being to will its own well-being:

The chief and fundamental incentive in a human being, as in an animal, is *egoism*, i.e. the urge to existence and well-being. . . . This egoism, both in an animal and in a human being, is linked in the most precise way with his innermost core and essence, and indeed is properly identical with it. . . . *Egoism* is by nature boundless: the human being unconditionally wills to preserve his existence, wills it unconditionally free from pains, including also from all lack and privation, wills every pleasure of which he is capable, and even seeks where possible to develop new capacities for pleasure. . . . In line with this, everyone makes himself the mid-point of the world, relates everything to himself. (BM, 190/SW 4: 196–7)

For Schopenhauer egoism is inimical to morality, hence a eudaemonistic ethics based around the value of happiness is not viable: 'People tried to present happiness now as *identical* to virtue, now as a *consequence* and effect of it: both failed every time' (BM, 120/SW 4: 113). Such ethical theories failed, in Schopenhauer's view, because the will toward happiness is a 'striving which leads [the will] on quite another path than the one morals would like to prescribe for it'. Happiness cannot be a basis for ethics, then, in Schopenhauer's view, because it is concerned always with satisfying naturally occurring desires for one's own individual well-being.

By contrast, negation of the will is a state of renunciation (*Entsagung*) or resignation (*Resignation*) from desires (WWR 1, 406/SW 2: 448), which Schopenhauer characterizes using other psychological terms: *Säligkeit*, *Friede*, *Ruhe*, *Heiterkeit*, *Erhabenheit*, *Gelassenheit*, *Freudigkeit*, *Zufriedenheit*—blissfulness, peace, rest, cheerfulness, elevation, composure, joyfulness, contentment.<sup>8</sup> The contrasts between this group of terms and the 'happiness' group (especially *Glück*, *Glücksäligkeit*, *Befriedigung*) are sometimes subtle and may be missed, especially in translation.<sup>9</sup> For example, *Befriedigung* is contrasted with *Zufriedenheit*. *Befriedigung* suggests a 'having-been-satisfied', connoting a relation to a prior state of unfulfilled desire. *Zufriedenheit*, by contrast, evokes a stable state of being untroubled

<sup>8</sup> For examples see WWR 1, 401, 406, 417, 419/SW 2: 442, 448, 461, 464.

<sup>9</sup> A further complication is that in different contexts Schopenhauer occasionally uses some of his less frequent terms on both sides of the divide, e.g. *Heiterkeit* and *Freudigkeit*. Compare passages at WWR 1, 343, 416 439/SW 2: 373, 461, 486.

by desires. *Glücksäligkeit* likewise is used for an achieved state of happiness or well-being resulting from the satisfaction of desires, while *Säligkeit*, blissfulness, denotes a state in which desires do not arise. Thus is it inaccurate to say, as Reginster does, that for Schopenhauer 'the highest good (happiness)' is 'the absence of pain and suffering, which he believes can only be achieved through resignation'.<sup>10</sup> Through resignation one reaches a state other than happiness. We find a parallel in Schopenhauer's conception of aesthetic experience, where, with the temporary suspension of willing in the subject's consciousness, 'happiness and unhappiness disappear... [N]either happiness nor misery is taken with us across this border' (WWR 1, 221–2/SW 2: 233). So happiness is not Schopenhauer's 'highest good'. But what about the rest of Reginster's statement? There is reason to expect that in Schopenhauer's view the absence of pain and suffering attained through resignation should indeed count as the highest good. Schopenhauer is quite emphatic that the essence of the good is 'to exist only in relation to a desiring will' (WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 429). He also believes that 'the basis of all willing is need, lack, and thus pain' (WWR 1, 338/SW 2: 367). Thus if desiring is pain, and the good, whose essence exists in relation to the desiring will, consists in that pain's cessation, we might reasonably expect a permanent absence of all pain to be the highest good. So those who treat the negation of the will as Schopenhauer's highest good do so quite intelligibly and are going with the grain of his thought. And yet Schopenhauer denies that negation of the will is the highest good. We need to examine why he does so.

### 3. No Highest Good

In 1817, as he was preparing *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer wrote the following note:

As is often said, *good* is that which pleases the will, and is therefore always only relative. It never satisfies the will completely so that afterwards the will ceases to desire. Such cessation occurs only when the will turns and abolishes itself.... But since this self-abolition is the complete and absolute silencing of the will, then figuratively and in comparison with the conditional and temporal means of silencing the will which we all call *good*, that self-abolition could be called the absolute good, the highest good, the *summum bonum*.

(MR 1: 516/HN 1: 466, translation slightly modified)

<sup>10</sup> Reginster 2006: 12.



This perhaps gives the impression that Schopenhauer thinks there is a highest good, and is just being hesitant when he says you could (*könnte*) say so, if you were speaking figuratively (*bildlich*). These qualifications are rather obscure, however, and are not further explained here. In the published text of *The World as Will and Representation* his position has hardened considerably. He makes a point of raising the question whether there can be a highest good or *summum bonum* at all, and answers the question with a firm 'No'. Here is the passage:

Given what we have said, the *good*, according to its concept, is a relative thing [*tōn pros ti*], which is to say that every good is essentially relative: because its essence is to exist only in relation to a desiring will. *Absolute good* is thus a contradiction: highest good [*höchstes Gut*] or *summum bonum* mean the same thing, denoting properly an ultimate satisfaction for the will, following which there will be no new willing. . . . But . . . such a thing is unthinkable. . . . The will can have no lasting fulfilment that gives perfect and permanent satisfaction to its strivings. It is the vessel of the Danaids: there is no highest good, no absolute good for the will, but rather only ever a temporary good.  
(WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 427–8)

That there is no ultimate satisfaction for the will is one of Schopenhauer's most insistent themes, expressed sometimes with powerful rhetoric: 'its desires are unlimited, its claims inexhaustible, and every satisfied desire gives birth to a new one. No possible worldly satisfaction could be enough to quiet its longing, give its desires a final goal, and fill the bottomless pit of its heart' (WWR 2, 588/SW 3: 657). Attaining a state of satisfaction is good, but in no case does it eliminate our disposition to form new unsatisfied states of desire, and there is no such thing as an overall satisfaction that leaves us desiring nothing. With this picture of willing firmly in place, Schopenhauer must hold that there is no highest good to be attained through the satisfaction of the will.

The claim that a highest good is impossible per se is consistent with the rest of Schopenhauer's published writings, for while the phrase *höchstes Gut* occurs from time to time, in no serious philosophical context does Schopenhauer use the expression in his own voice.<sup>11</sup> He uses it sometimes for a supposed good that he regards as illusory: thus a man may be *deluded* into thinking that union

<sup>11</sup> In *Parerga and Paralipomena*, in the popular 'Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life', Schopenhauer states that *Heiterkeit*, cheerfulness, is 'the highest good for a being whose reality has the form of an indivisible present between two eternities' (PP 1, 283/SW 5: 344). But the context here is not

with a particular beautiful woman is the highest good (WWR 2, 555/SW 3: 617), and at a more general level 'life must *be valued* [*gelten*] as the highest good' (WWR 2, 482/SW 3: 532; my emphasis) to all of us who are imbued with the will to life and restricted to its limited perspective. Schopenhauer criticizes the use of 'highest good' in other ethical theories, such as Stoicism's 'virtue is the highest good' (see WWR 1, 113, 116/SW 2: 103, 106) and Kant's notion of the highest good, which he claims is a disguised appeal to an egoistic eudaemonism.<sup>12</sup> But Schopenhauer does not make any literal assertion of his own concerning a highest good. The closest he comes to a positive, unqualified use of the expression is in the evocative passage in the Third Book of *The World as Will and Representation* where he characterizes the tranquillity of aesthetic experience:

[T]he peace [*Ruhe*] that we always sought on the first path of willing but that always eluded us comes of its own accord, and all is well with us [*uns ist völlig wohl*]. It is the painless state that Epicurus prized as the highest good and the state of the gods: for that moment we are freed from the terrible pressure of the will, we celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing, the wheel of Ixion stands still. (WWR 1, 220/SW 2: 231)

The conception of highest good here is attributed only to Epicurus, but the question arises: Why would Schopenhauer himself refuse to concur? This aesthetic state of being freed from willing is later invoked in his characterization of the will's self-negation: 'We can gather from this how blissful life must be for someone whose will is not merely momentarily placated, as it is in the pleasure of the beautiful, but calmed forever' (SW 2: 461/WWR 1, 417). It seems a short step to saying that this enduring painless state genuinely is the highest good. But Schopenhauer cannot take that step if he denies that a highest good is possible.

philosophically serious. The 'Aphorisms' are prefaced with the caveat that they are an exercise in 'eudaemonism', which his own previous work has shown to be an error, and that they are 'instructions to a happy existence', something whose possibility his philosophy denies (PP 1, 273/SW 5: 333).

<sup>12</sup> 'This reward postulated afterwards for virtue ... appears, however, decently veiled under the name of the *highest good*, which is the unification of virtue and happiness. But at bottom this is nothing other than the morals that issues in happiness and is consequently supported by self-interest, or eudaemonism, which Kant had ceremoniously ejected through the front door of his system as heteronomous, and which now creeps back in through the back door under the name *highest good*. Thus the contradiction-concealing assumption of an *unconditional, absolute ought* avenges itself' (BM, 128/SW 4: 124). See also BM, 123/SW 4: 118; WWR 1, 555/SW 2: 621.

Schopenhauer himself appears still to be of two minds, however, as he immediately follows his denial of the possibility of a highest good with an elaboration of his '*bildlich*' point from the notebooks:

But if we would like to retain an old expression out of habit, giving it an honorary or *emeritus* status, as it were, we might by way of a trope and figuratively [*tropischerweise und bildlich*] call the complete self-abolition and negation of the will, the true absence of the will [*Willenslosigkeit*], the only thing that can staunch and appease the impulses of the will forever, the only thing that can give everlasting contentment, the only thing that can redeem the world . . . —we might call this the absolute good, the *summum bonum*.

(WWR 1, 389/ SW 2: 428)

The notion of an honorary or *emeritus* status for the expression 'highest good' is new in the published version. What light can this notion throw on the value that Schopenhauer here envisages for the negation of the will? I shall discuss two recent answers, before offering my own different account.

First, Mark Migotti gives this reading of the distinction between a highest (or unconditioned) good and an *emeritus* highest good:

[I]n Schopenhauer's thought, the possibility of overcoming the will performs some, but not all, of the functions that the possibility of achieving the unconditioned good does in the thought of, for example, Aristotle and Kant (just as an *emeritus* professor performs some, but not all, of the functions of a regular full professor). (Migotti, 1995: 653)

Migotti elaborates on this by drawing attention to claims Schopenhauer makes elsewhere: (1) that if, prior to one's existence as a human being, one had to make a rational choice between this existence and non-existence, then non-existence would be the option to go for<sup>13</sup> (Migotti calls this Schopenhauer's 'prohairetic thesis'); and (2) that the only effective moral argument against suicide is that it masquerades as a 'release' from the misery of the world, thereby preventing realization of the 'real release' (*wirkliche Erlösung*) that

<sup>13</sup> See PP 1, 273/SW 5: 333, where Schopenhauer denies that human life is 'an existence that, considered objectively or rather after cool and careful consideration . . . would be decidedly preferable to non-existence.' There is a related thought at WWR 1, 350/SW 2: 382: '[P]erhaps there will never be a man who, clear-headed and sincere at the end of his life, would want to do it all again—he would much rather choose complete non-existence instead.'

consists precisely in staying alive in a conscious state of will-lessness.<sup>14</sup> Migotti reasons that if there were the possibility of realizing the highest good, it would provide an ultimate, non-relative ground for existing as a human being, and would make clear that it is 'worthwhile to *be* a human being in the first place'. Schopenhauer's *emeritus* highest good does not do the full job, but does at least show what 'makes it worthwhile to *continue* to be a human being, *given that one already is one*' (Migotti 1995: 653). Thus on this reading the limited function of the *emeritus* highest good is to give us reason to carry on existing, despite the fact that there would be no reason to choose existence, if we had had the choice. Migotti accordingly refers to the *emeritus* highest good as an 'ersatz *summum bonum*' and as a 'next best thing to an unconditioned good'.<sup>15</sup>

Bernard Reginster's more recent reading uses similar terms to characterize Schopenhauer's attitude to the state of 'complete resignation' in which the will negates itself: 'Although it is the best condition available to human beings, complete resignation remains for him a distant second-best to the fulfilment we had been hoping for, merely an ersatz happiness'.<sup>16</sup> On this view genuine 'happiness', construed as the fulfilment of all our desires, *is* after all the highest good, but it is certifiably unattainable. So negation of the will is just a depressing default, the highest *attainable* good—not real happiness, but a substitute for it. Reginster finds in this a 'curious ambivalence' on Schopenhauer's part towards negation of the will, and speaks of 'the persistent hankering for fulfilment it makes manifest',<sup>17</sup> as though Schopenhauer's view were 'if only we could attain the highest good . . . but we cannot, so let us give up on fulfilment and be satisfied with the lesser good that we can attain.'

For both Migotti and Reginster, the state of will-lessness is a 'next best' or 'second-best'. It is good for limited purposes, or as a replacement, an attainable good that falls somewhere short of another conceivable good that is unattainable.<sup>18</sup> There are, however, grounds to question two implications of these readings: (1) that will-lessness is to be regarded in any sense as an 'ersatz' or 'second-best' to something else, (2) that it is even to be regarded as good.

The first point is easier to challenge. There is no sense of 'ersatz' in Schopenhauer's account. He himself does not use this term, which the commentators themselves have imported into the argument, nor anything

<sup>14</sup> See PP 2, 309/SW 6: 328.

<sup>15</sup> Migotti 1995: 654.

<sup>16</sup> Reginster 2012: 355–6.

<sup>17</sup> Reginster 2012: 356.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Guyer suggests a similar 'second-best' status for a moral ideal of alleviating all suffering: 'Schopenhauer's negatively conceived *summum bonum* must . . . remain a mere ideal: the highest good would be to alleviate all suffering, but that is not something we can accomplish within the life of any natural beings' (Guyer 2012: 412). Schopenhauer, however, does not conceive this specifically moral aim as the *summum bonum*, either literally or figuratively.

approaching the connotation of 'second-best'. He writes only positively of the state of complete will-lessness, saying that it can 'redeem the world'. This is not easily read as a second-best to anything. Furthermore, what it is allegedly second-best to is not merely something we happen not to be capable of—rather, for him, it is an *impossibility*, a *contradiction*. Someone under the illusion that a highest good through final satisfaction of the will is a possibility might be subject to the 'hankering' that Reginster mentions, but Schopenhauer himself is not under that illusion. (If he were, he would resemble someone who carried on yearning to find a square circle, despite the fact only the merely circular ones are within our grasp.) He cannot, then, hold that there is a possible state for will-lessness to be a second-best to. So I maintain that (1) is false: Schopenhauer does not regard will-lessness in any sense as an 'ersatz' or 'second-best'. To the reader who is not convinced by Schopenhauer's theory, negation of the will may well look like a second-best. But for Schopenhauer himself that cannot be the import of the *emeritus* metaphor.

The second point is more troublesome, but a case can be made that in the relevant passage Schopenhauer does not treat the state of will-lessness as *good* at all. We can see this by making better sense of the metaphor of retirement. Schopenhauer's point is that the expression '*summum bonum*' is now *emeritus*. It no longer has any real work to do. Schopenhauer defines the concept *good* as 'essentially relative', such that it 'designates the *suitability of an object to any particular effort of the will*'. 'So', he continues, 'anything that is agreeable to the will in any one of its expressions, that is conducive to its purpose, is intended in the concept *good*' (WWR 1, 387/SW 2: 425), and again 'its essence is to exist only in relation to a desiring will' (WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 427).<sup>19</sup> But now it must occur to us that for someone in the state of will-lessness there is no desiring will to stand in relation to, with the apparent consequence that nothing can—literally—be good for someone in that state. While the *satisfaction* of willing can be a good (though never a final or *highest* good), *absence* of willing cannot, it seems, even be *good*. And since the concept *bad* likewise relates essentially to the will, denoting in general what is 'not conducive to the striving of the will' (WWR 1, 387/SW 2: 426), a state of true will-lessness ought presumably to be one that is beyond good and bad altogether. This seems to be corroborated by Schopenhauer's description of the *indifference* of the will-less subject, who

<sup>19</sup> For Schopenhauer there can arise no generalized version of the Euthyphro dilemma. There is no possibility that someone should 'recognize that something is *good* and will it only as a result of this, instead of willing it first and calling it *good* as a result of that' (WWR 1, 319/SW 2: 345).

remains only as a pure, cognizing being, as an untarnished mirror of the world. Nothing can worry him any more, nothing more can excite him, because he has cut all the thousands of threads of willing that keep us bound to the world . . . . He gazes back calmly at the phantasm of this world that . . . now stands before him as indifferently as chess pieces after the game is over.

(WWR 1, 417/SW 2: 462)

But now what Schopenhauer says looks puzzling in another way. If in this state nothing can even be good any more, and a fortiori nothing can be the highest good, why retain the expression 'highest good' in any capacity, why give it even a figurative role? There is ambivalence here, but contra Reginster it is not ambivalence about the *value* of will-lessness. As we shall see in the following sections, Schopenhauer regards negation of the will as having what he calls 'final value' and as 'superior to everything else' (WWR 1, 417/SW 2: 461). Given such assertions, we might expect him to assert that *being* in that state (albeit a state in which you have become indifferent to items in the world) would itself be *good*. But, on the other hand, if *nothing* can be good for you in a state of will-lessness, it seems at least uncomfortable to agree that being in that state would be good. So Schopenhauer is ambivalent because he finds himself in a conceptual strait-jacket, bound by the following commitments: If your will is absent, nothing can be good for you; but your will's being absent is the state that has final value, indeed final value for you. This would allow the conclusion that being in the state that has final value for you cannot be good for you. Schopenhauer's perfectly understandable ambivalence is thus conceptual: he hesitates to assert that absurd-seeming conclusion. Hence the escape clause: will-lessness is not literally the highest *good*, but we are on the right lines if we think of it as being so figuratively. In what follows, we shall confront the question whether Schopenhauer has, or can have, a coherent position built out of these materials.

#### 4. Moral Goodness and Transcendent Value

Schopenhauer makes a complex link between the negation of the will and moral goodness. (1) The two have a common origin: 'from the same source that gives rise to all goodness, love, virtue and nobility there ultimately arises also what I call negation of the will to life' (WWR 1, 405/SW 2: 447). (2) Negation of the will and moral goodness are distinct, and there is a 'transition' by which the one gives rise to the other: 'complete resignation and holiness . . .

comes from goodness once it attains its highest degree' (WWR 1, 394/SW 2: 434). And (3) the value of moral goodness is derivative from the value of negation of the will.

Morally good actions, for Schopenhauer, are those performed out of loving kindness (*Menschenliebe*) or justice (*Gerechtigkeit*), the two cardinal virtues that stem from the single morally valuable incentive, compassion (*Mitleid*), which is the disposition to will the well-being of another individual pure and simple. A particular action has moral worth if and only if it stems from compassion, and is one in which the other becomes 'the ultimate end of my will [*der letzte Zweck meines Willens*]' (BM, 200/SW 4: 208). It is important that moral goodness attaches to a kind of willing, and hence is distinct from will-lessness. "To love one's neighbour" means to will!—as Wittgenstein succinctly noted among some obliquely Schopenhauerian musings.<sup>20</sup> Thus the goodness of a moral action still falls under the definition of *good* as suitability to an effort of the will. If I will the well-being of another individual, my will is satisfied to the extent that her well-being (*Wohl*) is promoted or her suffering or 'woe' (*Wehe*) is diminished. The outcome of such an action is good relative to my will. But its *moral* goodness stems from its bearing also a relation to the will of the other. Those who are 'benevolent [*wohlwollend*]' were originally 'called *good* human beings, because of the way their actions related to the wills of others in general' (WWR 1, 387/SW 2: 426). My actions are good because they promote what others want, their own well-being; and I am good if my actions tend to be good in this way.

The common source for both moral goodness and negation of the will is the recognition of one's innermost self in all beings. The morally good person already 'makes less of a distinction than is usually made between himself and others' (WWR 1, 399/SW 2: 439), and the highest moral goodness belongs to the person who attains a 'pure . . . unselfish love of others' to such a degree that his or her own existence can be sacrificed for others (WWR 1, 401–2/SW 2: 443). The person who exhibits this kind of selflessness can undergo a transition to will-lessness:

[I]t is the means for someone to assume even the sufferings that originally fell to others . . . [H]e identifies his own lot with that of humanity in general: but this lot is a hard one, with troubles, suffering, and death. Someone who

<sup>20</sup> "Seinen Nächsten lieben," das hieße wollen! (Wittgenstein 1969: 77). Young 1987: 150 makes the connection with this passage. In Wittgenstein's notes from 29 July 1916 he seems to be ruminating on Schopenhauerian issues that relate to those of the present paper: 'Kann man gut wollen, böse wollen und nicht wollen? Oder ist nur der glücklich, der nicht will? . . . Ist es, nach den allgemeinen Begriffen, gut, seinem Nächsten nichts zu wünschen, weder Gutes noch Schlechtes? Und doch scheint im einem gewissen Sinne das Nichtwünschen das einzig Gute zu sein.'

renounces every accidental advantage and wills for himself no other lot than the lot of humanity in general, will not be able to do this for long: the attachment to life and its pleasures must soon fade and give way to a general renunciation: and thus appears the negation of the will.

(WWR 2, 621/SW 3: 696)

The idea seems to be that if you are an exceptionally virtuous human being to whom all suffering and all threats to well-being begin to matter equally, irrespective of which individual bears them, then from a state in which you are motivated to alleviate all suffering, you find suffering too great, too all-pervasive, to be prevented or alleviated, and become motivationally inert.

The value that attaches to the resulting negation of the will is to be contrasted with that of morality as such. In a letter dated November 20, 1844 the jurist Johann August Becker posed Schopenhauer the question: 'For whom does the incentive that you call "uniquely moral" have particular value?'<sup>21</sup> Schopenhauer's reply of 10 December contains these remarks:

You ask: 1) *for whom* moral actions have value?—For *him* that performs them. Hence...his satisfaction with himself and the approval of impartial witnesses.... And 2) in comparison with what?—with all of his other actions that arise from the first two incentives [egoism and malice].

*Now as to what this value of moral action ultimately rests on—... the value that such actions have for the one who performs them himself is a transcendent value, inasmuch as it lies in their leading him towards the sole path of salvation, i.e. deliverance from this world of being born, suffering and dying.... So this contains the really final elucidation concerning the value [Werth] of morality, which value is not itself something absolutely final [ein absolut Letztes], but rather a step towards it.* (GB, 220, my translation)

We should pause to ask what 'final value' might mean here. On a common recent understanding we attribute 'final' value to something that is valued 'as an end' or 'for its own sake', rather than for the sake of something else, or instrumentally as a means to something else.<sup>22</sup> No doubt Schopenhauer construes the state of 'absolutely final' value as being valuable for its own sake. But in making the above contrast he appears to say that the value in my acting compassionately is *not* a final value, but some kind of instrumental

<sup>21</sup> Becker 1883: 27, my translation.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g. Korsgaard 1995; Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 1999.



value. He calls the moral virtues ‘*a means of advancing self-denial, and consequently negation of the will to life*’ (WWR 2, 621/SW 3: 696),<sup>23</sup> again as if the moral virtues were not valuable for their own sake. Secondly, and more shockingly, he seems to suggest that my acting compassionately has value only *for me*. However, I suggest that both of these impressions are misleading. In Schopenhauer’s own account, my acting morally has value for the other whose suffering I aim to remove or whose well-being I aim to promote, and it has value for its own sake. It is not that I act out of compassion in order to facilitate the will’s ultimate self-negation in myself. My motivation, and the end of my action, must be nothing but the removal of the other’s suffering:

If someone who was giving alms were to ask me what he gets out of doing so, my conscientious answer would be: ‘Just that that poor man’s fate has been alleviated by so much; but apart from that nothing at all. If that is no use to you and really does not matter to you, then you did not really want to give alms, but rather to make a purchase: then you have been swindled out of your money. But if it did matter to you that that man who is oppressed by want should suffer less, then you have indeed achieved your end, you get out of it the fact that he suffers less, and you see precisely how much your gift rewards itself’. (BM 217–18/SW 4: 228–9)

Thus my compassionate action can be good for the other, and the non-occurrence of the other’s pain, which is the end at which I aim in being compassionate, can be good for its own sake.

In order to distinguish the ‘absolutely final’ value of negation of the will from the value of moral goodness, we need to interpret ‘final value’ not only as value for its own sake, but as what we might call *complete* or *terminal* value. In the very passage on the *emeritus* highest good from which we started, Schopenhauer designates negation of the will as ‘the one radical cure for the disease against which all other goods—such as fulfilled wishes and achieved happiness—are only palliatives, only anodynes’ (WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 486). Even moral action resembles ordinary egoistic action in being concerned with the fulfilment of desires for some individual’s well-being. Hence even moral action achieves only palliative goods. There is no *completable* good to be attained either by egoistic willing or by moral willing. Whatever desires one

<sup>23</sup> My emphasis. (Additional note: translation modified, using the phrase ‘a means of advancing’ from WWR 1 [Payne], 606.)

satisfies, whatever sufferings one alleviates—whether of this individual or that—there will always be more unsatisfied desires and more unalleviated suffering. (Hence the images of the bottomless pit, the ever-revolving wheel of Ixion and the eternally leaking sieve of the Danaids.) In this sense, no egoistic good is ever final, but neither is any moral good. By contrast, negation of the will achieves finality by terminating willing. It therefore transcends the goodness of individualistic desire satisfaction, whether concerning the agent's own desires towards individual well-being or the corresponding desires of other individuals.

## 5. Two Kinds of Value?

Schopenhauer studiously avoids saying even that negation of the will is good, let alone that it is the highest good. But if will-lessness is the state of final value, how can it fail to be good? Are there two kinds of value at stake here: good *versus* neither-good-nor-bad? And does negation of the will have the value of being neither-good-nor-bad? At one level this appears to be the case. The ordinary unredeemed individual achieves goods for herself from time to time by satisfying her will; by contrast the subject of *Willenslosigkeit* is unmoved and indifferent. The game of willing is over and nothing presents itself as good or bad for her at all. Schopenhauer sometimes portrays the latter condition as a seeming void that is incomprehensible and repellent from the ordinary perspective in which things can be good for us:

Only nothing remains before us. But our nature, which resists this melting away into nothing, is really only the will to life which we ourselves are . . . . The fact that we hate nothing so much is nothing more than another expression of the fact that we will life so much, and we are nothing other than this will and know nothing other than it. (WWR 1, 438/SW 2: 486)

If it is hard for us to see what kind of value there could be in indifference to the world, that is because of our limited, naturally will-bound perspective. The problem, however, is that Schopenhauer wishes not only to contrast these as different, mutually opaque conditions, but also to rank them in value. One condition is the salvation *from* the other, the genuinely final end or goal that frees someone from pursuing the lesser goals attainable in the other. Although he resists saying that will-lessness is a higher good than the natural life of willing, or even that it is a good, Schopenhauer is implicitly thinking in this

way when he describes the condition of salvation as ‘superior’ (*überwiegend*) to everything else (WWR 1, 417/SW 2: 461), and negation of the will as ‘the one radical cure for the disease against which all *other goods*—such as fulfilled wishes and achieved happiness—are only palliatives, only anodynes’ (WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 428; my emphasis). Implicitly, will-lessness is *good* here, just good in a different way from the fulfilment of desires. And surely this must be so, for if being in the state of indifference to good and bad were not itself a good of some kind, albeit hard to fathom, what could there be to recommend it over the natural life of willing?

It now begins to look as though Schopenhauer needs a modification to his conception of *good*, and perhaps if we are charitable, we might grant it to him implicitly.<sup>24</sup> One suggestion might be that Schopenhauer is implicitly operating with two concepts of *good*, which we could call *good<sub>w</sub>* and *good<sub>n</sub>*. Something is *good<sub>w</sub>* if and only if it satisfies some will. Something is *good<sub>n</sub>* if it has value, but does not have it in virtue of satisfying a will. There can be no highest *good<sub>w</sub>*. Will-lessness is not among things that are *good<sub>w</sub>*, but it is *good<sub>n</sub>*. So, there is a highest good, but only in the sense of *good<sub>n</sub>*. That might be a way to redescribe Schopenhauer’s struggle with the literal/figurative dichotomy. However, this view meets serious objections. It would not only go against Schopenhauer’s consistently maintained claim that *good* is univocal (being effectively just our *good<sub>w</sub>*), but would also fall afoul of the need to rank the different ways of being good against one another. Unless there is some way of asking whether it is better to be in a *good<sub>w</sub>* or a *good<sub>n</sub>* state, the notion of the latter kind of state as ‘superior’, ‘final’, and ‘redemptive’, as against the other’s inferior ‘palliative’ or ‘temporary’ nature, seems unsupported once again. This ranking is crucial to Schopenhauer, but would seem to throw him back upon a unitary concept of *better*, and hence of *good*, *tout court*.

## 6. A Different Kind of Willing

It seems that for Schopenhauer’s doctrine of negation of the will as the state of final value to make sense we need two *ways of being good*. How to achieve this without abandoning his univocal definition of *good* as existing ‘only in relation to a desiring will’? The key is to see that there can be *two kinds of willing*. This again

<sup>24</sup> Migotti 1995: 657 raises this issue: ‘John Atwell in personal correspondence suggests that we attribute to Schopenhauer two conceptions of good, the strict one defined above, and a broader one according to which will-lessness . . . is good. I think that this is a suggestion worth pursuing, though it would immediately invalidate Schopenhauer’s claim that the concept “good” is univocal.’

may seem to fly in the face of Schopenhauer's basic contrast between willing and will-lessness, but there is, I suggest, more evidence for two kinds of willing than there is for two conceptions of good. Consider the following passages:

[W]e sometimes gain a very intimate recognition of the nothingness and bitterness of life in the form of our own painful sufferings or our vivid recognition of the sufferings of others, and we *would like to* [*möchten*] take the sting out of desire and prevent any suffering from coming in, to cleanse and sanctify ourselves through complete and lasting renunciation—but then we are quickly enmeshed in the delusion of appearance once more, and its motives put the will back into motion: we cannot tear ourselves away.

(WWR 1, 406/SW 2: 448; my emphasis)

if the negation of the will has arisen in someone, that person is full of inner joy and true heavenly peace . . . and when we behold this person with our eyes or in our imagination, we cannot help feeling *the greatest longing* [*die größte Sehnsucht*], since we acknowledge that this alone is in the right and infinitely superior to everything else. (WWR 1, 416–17/SW 2: 461; my emphasis)

These passages show that the ordinary person caught in the round of natural desire and satisfaction that Schopenhauer normally calls 'the will', also wants or longs for a superior state of peace and renunciation. In some sense then, we *will* will-lessness. If that is so, we can retain Schopenhauer's univocal definition of good, and say that the peace of will-lessness would after all be a good for us. And since we long for it as 'superior to everything else', it would after all be the highest good. So Schopenhauer need not have been so cagey. Negation of the will can be literally the highest good after all, because it is the satisfaction of the will to be will-less.

Schopenhauer therefore needs an account of a kind of will other than the natural, individualistic will to life, which, as we have seen, he regards as the human essence and tends just to call 'the will'. He does not officially develop a case that there are different kinds of willing, but the notion surfaces in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, in his treatment of the effects of tragedy on the spectator:

He becomes aware, if only in an obscure feeling, that it would be better to tear his heart free from life, to turn his willing away, not to love the world and life; at which point, deep inside of him, the consciousness is born that there must be another type of existence for *a different sort of willing*.

(WWR 2, 452/SW 3: 497; my emphasis)

In this case, as in the two passages previously quoted, the subject becomes conscious of a will or desire for a state in which the desires characteristic of 'the world and life' are in abeyance. Schopenhauer likewise refers to a 'striving [*Streben*] that tends in a direction diametrically opposed to that of happiness, i.e. of well-being and life' (WWR 1, 388/SW 2: 427). So there must be a state of will or desire distinct from the will to life, in whose grip the subject remains for the time being.

A further reason for distinguishing this willing or striving from the will to life is found in Schopenhauer's description of the psychological conflict in the 'saintly' subject who has attained the state of 'will-lessness' but must struggle to maintain it:

[T]he peace and blissfulness we have described in the lives of saintly people is only a flower that emerges from the constant overcoming of the will, and we see the constant struggle with the will to life as the soil from which it arises; on earth nobody can have lasting peace. . . . Thus we also see people who have succeeded at some point in negating the will bend all their might to hold to this path by wresting renunciations of every sort from themselves, by adopting a difficult, penitent way of life and seeking out everything they find unpleasant: anything in order to subdue the will that will always strive anew. . . . I have often used the expression *asceticism*, and I understand by it, in the narrow sense, this *deliberate* [*vorsätzliche*] breaking of the will.

(WWR 1, 418–19/SW 2: 463)

These people are striving, by deliberate and persistent effort, toward the end of 'subduing', 'breaking', or 'overcoming' the will to life. Schopenhauer oscillates between 'will to life' and 'will' here, as elsewhere. But it is clear that what is striven against is specifically the will to life, the natural tendency toward satisfying individualistic desires. And equally clearly the 'saintly' agent has *desires* toward that natural tendency. He or she has a desire to be without individualistic desires.

Schopenhauer locates this desire 'in the depth of our being', saying that it 'sometimes' comes to consciousness, and that on occasion we 'cannot help' feeling it. So this is no ordinary desire that is uppermost in our deliberations and upon which we act in our ordinary dealings with the world. It appears to be a dispositional desire that can be present despite our not being consciously aware of it. Schopenhauer is eminently receptive in principle to such a desire, given his recognition that 'we often do not know what we want, or what we fear. We can nourish a wish for years without either admitting it to ourselves

or even letting it come clearly into consciousness' (WWR 2, 221/SW 3: 234–5). It accords with this that the presence of a desire to be without individualistic desires appears anomalous and can be revealed only in the exceptional circumstances Schopenhauer mentions—reflection on overwhelming suffering, receptivity to tragic drama, saintly concern for the world that extinguishes concern for individual well-being, encounter with a saintly person or an imaginative attempt to identify with what they would experience. In these circumstances we glimpse what for Schopenhauer must be a truth, that beyond willing their own individual well-being, and beyond willing even the well-being of all individuals equally, human beings also *will* release from that kind of willing altogether, indeed release from individuality as such.

## 7. Summary

We are now in a position to understand better Schopenhauer's ambivalence over the issue of the highest good. There is a sense in which negation of the will to life is the highest good, but also a sense in which it would be quite misleading to characterize it in that way. It is not the *highest of* the goods that can be attained by satisfying ordinary, individualistic desires, nor a summative good that is compounded out of any number of such desires being satisfied. If *good* is understood as the satisfaction of desires that are directed towards individual well-being or happiness, then negation of the will, which is the absence of such desires, is not the highest good. On the other hand, since negation of the will is the unique state of final value, which transcends both egoistic and moral goods, it is a kind of good higher than those other goods. It can be good in the full Schopenhauerian sense of answering to a desiring will, provided that we recognize a will to be without desires that are directed towards individual well-being. I have suggested that Schopenhauer needs such a counter-will in order to avoid serious inconsistency. Without this different kind of willing, either (1) there is a unique state of final and superior value that is not good, or (2) there is a kind of good that is not the satisfaction of a will. The solution is to allow that negation of the will is good, and that it is the satisfaction of a will, but to make clear that it is good in virtue of satisfying a different kind of willing, a desire to be without desires directed to the well-being of individuals. Thus, although it is something that I want at some level, negation of the will is not the attainment of the happiness or well-being of the individual human being that I am, or regard myself as being. As Schopenhauer puts it in reply to Becker, 'The pursuit [*Verfolgen*] and

attainment of one's own salvation, since it consists in the negation of the will to life and along with that the giving up of one's own individuality [*Aufgeben der eigenen Individualität*], is not to be subsumed under the concept *egoism*', for 'by *egoism* we understand the exclusive concern for one's own individual' (GB, 221).

## 8. Some Difficulties

We have argued that an explicit claim that negation of the will *is good*, combined with his commitment to the view that good is solely what answers to a desiring will, would lead Schopenhauer to acknowledge that the will's negation is itself something willed. However, serious difficulties ensue for Schopenhauer if he openly acknowledges this latter point. What threatens is nothing less than a contradiction at the heart of his metaphysics. We can start with the challenge of explaining how beings whose essence is to will can become non-willing beings. Ivan Soll raises this objection:

Schopenhauer argues that we are . . . creatures whose entire being is will and nothing but will. Given this view of our nature, it becomes incomprehensible how we could ever possibly suspend our will or have an experience in which our wills were not engaged. One can take a break from what one does, but not from what one *is*. (Soll 2012: 311–12)

As we have seen, according to Schopenhauer's official picture, 'will' is interchangeable with 'will to life'. If the will to life is my essence, I can surely not cease to will life. It is at best unclear whether Schopenhauer has developed the resources to explain this duality convincingly. His most obvious move is to exploit the notion of the non-individuated will to life, that which underlies all individuals as their common metaphysical essence, what we might call 'the will to life in itself'. Thus while I, as individual empirical manifestation of will to life, strive for the well-being of the human individual that I am, the will to life in itself is indifferent to the individual and can freely turn to 'not willing' ('the same thing that *willed* hitherto *wills* no more . . . . The subject of these two acts is one and the same' (PP 2, 218/SW 6: 331)).<sup>25</sup> But this replicates the same problem as above at a higher metaphysical level: it is mysterious how the

<sup>25</sup> In this passage from the second volume of *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer contrasts willing and not-willing under their Latin names *velle* and *nolle*, and insists both that they have the same

metaphysical essence that manifests itself in me precisely as the urge to individual existence and well-being can manifest itself also in the cessation of desiring that existence and well-being. Schopenhauer's associate Frauenstädt presented this objection to him in correspondence: '[I]f in its extra-temporality it is already *will to life*, how is it ever supposed to be able to get rid of its essence? After all, no thing can ever become free of its *essence*.'<sup>26</sup> Schopenhauer's response is not convincing. He simply makes a bald counter-assertion: 'Precisely *in* willing the will can *never* be free, ... but it can become free *from* willing' (GB, 288). He rejects Frauenstädt's suggestion that a retreat to the Kantian position in which the thing in itself is indeterminate would remove the problem. The thing in itself must have a determinate essence: it is will, but can also be free from the willing that is its essence. How it does so, he continues, is not intuitively graspable, but that it does so somehow is evidenced over millennia by the history of asceticism.

While this is a serious problem for Schopenhauer, it is not the full story. It can be argued that to find nothing but a contradiction here is to ignore the complexity in Schopenhauer's conception of our sense of selfhood. Rudolf Malter, in his magisterial account of Schopenhauer's soteriology, writes as follows (my translation): 'The will can will only its willing. The talk of the free-willed negation (self-negation) of the will, if it were Schopenhauer's final soteriological word, would make the system end in a straight logical contradiction, and so in a simple scandal.'<sup>27</sup> But, Malter continues, this is not the end of the matter: instead Schopenhauer 'rescues his soteriology and thereby the goal of his entire philosophy from the *nihil negativum* of logical contradiction'<sup>28</sup> by recourse to the pure subject of cognition. Malter emphasizes rightly that this conception of the subject is built into Schopenhauer's philosophy from the very start. 'I' must refer (or purportedly refer) not only to an individual human being who embodies will to life, but to a self that can

'subject', but that the subject of *nolle* must remain unexplained: 'The *affirmation* and *negation* of the will to life is a mere *velle* and *nolle*. The subject of these two acts is one and the same ... Of the latter we can only say that its appearance cannot be that of the *velle*, but we do not know whether it appears at all, i.e., whether it obtains a secondary existence for an intellect which it would first have to produce ... [N]or can we say anything about its subject, since we have positively recognized it only in the opposing act, the *velle*, as the thing in itself of its world of appearance' (PP 2, 281–2/SW 6: 331–2).

<sup>26</sup> 'Sei er nun in seiner Außerzeitlichkeit schon Wille zum Leben, wie sollte er da jemals von diesem seinen Wesen loskommen können? Von seinem Wesen könne doch kein Ding jemals frei werden' (from Hübscher's summary of Frauenstädt's letter, GB, 568–9).

<sup>27</sup> 'Der Wille kann nur sein Wollen. Die Rede von der freiwilligen Verneinung (Selbstverneinung) des Willens würde, wenn sie Schopenhauers letztes soteriologische Wort wäre, das System in einem einfachen logischen Widerspruch, also in einem simplen Skandal, enden lassen' (Malter 1991: 408–9).

<sup>28</sup> '...seine Soteriologie und hiermit den Zielpunkt seiner gesamten Philosophie vor dem nihil negativum des logischen Widerspruchs rettet' (Malter 1991: 409).



cease to identify itself with any such individual. Schopenhauer provides for this with his notion of the pure subject of cognition that we ordinarily 'find ourselves as' (WWR 1, 25/SW 2: 5), and that we can remain as once the will is negated. That we are thus aware of ourselves as subject does not contradict the claim that our entire being is will. For awareness of oneself as subject, like the Kantian 'synthetic unity of apperception',<sup>29</sup> introduces no ontological commitments; the subject is a mere arena of conscious experience that has 'only a conditional, indeed, strictly speaking, a merely apparent reality' (SW 3: 315/WWR 2, 291). In ordinary life, 'I' embraces both the individual, embodied human being who wills his or her own well-being, and the self as subject. If we can accept this complexity in the notion of self,<sup>30</sup> then it at least *prima facie* makes sense that one can persist as a self-conscious centre of experience without desiring or striving for the well-being of any one individual in the world. But, as Malter points out, this does not solve the mystery of the will's becoming free to negate itself. Schopenhauer cannot explain how the inert and indifferent pure subject can bring about the will's transformation from willing to not-willing. He says that the negation of the will 'emerges from the innermost relation of cognition to willing in human beings' (WWR 1, 432/SW 2: 478), but that relation remains in principle unfathomable. Schopenhauer may remove the pernicious contradiction in the will's ceasing to be itself, but only by superseding the contradiction with 'a problem of which it has been shown that it cannot be solved'.<sup>31</sup>

However, assuming the account we have given above, a contradiction still remains if Schopenhauer wishes to claim that negation of the will is good. If the negation of the will is good, then it must be the object of some kind of willing. But where can that willing come from? The pure subject of cognition is 'incapable of...willing or affect in general [*überhaupt keines Wollens oder Affektes*]' (WWR 2, 514/SW 3: 571). So if there is a desire that opposes the will to life, it must stem not from the pure subject, but from some willing element in me. There is nothing about me that can *oppose*—i.e. desire not to have—the will to life, other than the will to life itself. In order for negation of the will to be good, therefore, the will to life still seems required to 'take a break' from what it is; it has to be both a seat of desires for the well-being of the living individual, and of a desire to be free of such desires. With his implicit notion of a desire to be free of the will, Schopenhauer has recognized a degree of psychological

<sup>29</sup> Schopenhauer makes this comparison at WWR 2, 290/SW 3: 314.

<sup>30</sup> On the complexity of the self in Schopenhauer see Janaway 1989; Welsen 1995; Zöller 1999.

<sup>31</sup> '... mit einem Problem... von welchem nachgewiesen ist, daß es nicht gelöst werden kann' (Malter 1991: 409).

complexity that his dual account of the metaphysical thing in itself and the pure subject is too simple to capture.

Finally, a different problem arguably arises for Schopenhauer's argument against suicide: that by ending individual existence it prevents realization of the real release or redemption (*wirkliche Erlösung*) that consists in a state of will-lessness.<sup>32</sup> Would not an act of terminating one's own individual existence fulfil the desire to be without individualistic desires, and consequently result in the same value as will-less consciousness? Schopenhauer's argument works only against a suicide that occurs when someone still has desires for individual well-being, and suffers from their being unfulfilled:

The person who commits suicide wills life, and is only unsatisfied with the conditions under which life has been given to him. Thus, when he destroys the individual appearance he is relinquishing only life, not the will to life. He wills life, wills the unimpeded existence and affirmation of his body, but the tangle of circumstances does not allow him this and he undergoes great suffering. (WWR 1, 425–6/SW 2: 471)

Suicide of this kind eliminates suffering prematurely, still under the assumption that the individual's well-being or lack of it matters, rather than realizing the final state of becoming indifferent both to individual suffering and to individual satisfaction. But what if one chose to end one's existence *because* one had become indifferent both to individual suffering and to individual satisfaction? Schopenhauer has no argument against that kind of suicide.<sup>33</sup> In fact, he approves of it:

[I]t seems that the complete negation of the will can reach the point where even the will needed to maintain the vegetative functions of the body through nutrition can fall away. Far from stemming from the will to life, in this kind of suicide an ascetic of this type stops living simply because he has stopped willing altogether. (WWR 1, 428/SW 2: 474)

In such a state one can acquiesce in or welcome death: 'to die willingly [*willig*], gladly, joyfully is the prerogative of someone who is resigned, who has relinquished and negated the will to life' (WWR 2, 525/SW 3: 583). So once again the subject of will-lessness retains a desire of a kind: to be rid of the

<sup>32</sup> PP 2, 309/SW 6: 328.

<sup>33</sup> This is recognized in the secondary literature, e.g. by Young 1987: 127.

individual, finding in death ‘the great opportunity not to be I any longer’ (WWR 2, 524/SW 3: 582).

Schopenhauer’s argument is that choosing non-existence for the wrong reasons robs one of the opportunity to enter the experiential state of willlessness, which we have argued is the highest good for Schopenhauer by virtue of its satisfying the desire to be free of individualistic desires. There is of course a distinction between satisfying a desire to experience the peace or contentment of having no individualistic desires and satisfying a desire to be rid of such desires by not existing as an individual at all. It is the former, not the latter, that is termed ‘salvation’. Salvation is not non-existence. Yet to enter this state is to lose—allegedly beneficially—the sense that one’s existence as such is really worth holding on to. So to attain Schopenhauer’s highest good is compatible with desiring one’s non-existence, and at least entails recognizing its desirability.

PART II

SCHOPENHAUER

*Being, Not Being, and the Individual*

## Beyond the Individual

### Schopenhauer, Wagner, and the Value of Love

#### 1. Introduction

In Schopenhauer's view, human individuality is a problem, for two reasons. It is unsatisfactory, and it is not fundamentally real. From our own subjective point of view, we exist and have cognition as individuals, and we inhabit a world in which we appear as separate from all others, separate indeed from all other existent things. But from the point of view of the world, Schopenhauer says, individuality is unreal: ultimate reality is undivided, and individual things of any kind exist only in the world as it is *for us*, that is, the world as presented to the mind of a subject which organizes experience through the forms of space and time that constitute the *principium individuationis*. But our existence as individuals is also the wrong place to seek any true value:

Awoken to life from the night of unconsciousness, the will finds itself as an individual in a world without end or limit, among countless individuals who are all striving, suffering, going astray; and it hurries back to the old unconsciousness, as if through a bad dream.—But until then its desires are unlimited, its claims inexhaustible, and every satisfied desire gives birth to a new one. No possible worldly satisfaction could be enough to quiet its longing, give its desires a final goal, and fill the bottomless pit of its heart. Moreover, we can see what usually becomes of a human being with any sort of satisfaction: it is for the most part nothing more than the meagre daily preservation of this existence itself, amid endless trouble and constant care, in the struggle with need and with death in view.—Everything in life proclaims that earthly happiness is ordained to be in vain or recognized as an illusion. (WWR 2, 588/SW 3: 657)

Schopenhauer sees individuality as a kind of transgression, the individual as something fallen, mistaken, or broken away from a primordial unity: 'every individuality is only a special error, a misstep, something that would be better

off not being, and in fact the true purpose of life is to retrieve us from it' (WWR 2, 508/SW 3: 563). But where does love belong in Schopenhauer's picture of the human condition? Love, one might think, is a source of happiness that is no mere passing gratification, a consolation for an otherwise solitary existence, a triumph over separateness, or at least a yearning to overcome it, a hope that we are not merely stranded each in our own deceptive, ego-centred predicament. As Plato's Aristophanes put it long ago in the *Symposium*: "Love" is the name for our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete': everyone in love would want to 'melt together with the one he loves, so that one person emerged from two'.<sup>1</sup> Love appears as a way of regaining a completeness from which we have become alienated. So if individuality is a misstep and an error, will love correct the error, and reunite the individual with a whole beyond themselves, or perhaps a whole in which their true self consists? As we shall see, Schopenhauer has two contrasting answers to this question, because the term 'love' covers two quite distinct states.

In the *Symposium* Plato's word for love is *erōs*. *Erōs* begins as a desire for bodily union with another human individual, but can attain to the highest possible objects of value through an ascent to a passionate intellectual grasp of timeless universals that transcend not only the individual beloved but 'any other great nonsense of mortality' (*Symposium* 211e). But Schopenhauer does not follow Plato here, despite the fact that he cites Plato as one of his inspirations,<sup>2</sup> and allots a vital role to 'Platonic Ideas' in his philosophy overall. In brief, the Ideas serve for Schopenhauer as timeless, unchanging kinds or species found in nature, in contradistinction to the multiple individual, spatio-temporal entities (humans included) that appear, alter and fluctuate, and then hurry back out of existence. The chief means we have for rising to cognition of these Ideas lies in aesthetic experience. In a much-quoted passage Schopenhauer says that, in contemplating any object in the aesthetic mode of experience,

what we thus cognize is no longer the individual thing as such, but rather the Idea, the eternal form . . . and this is precisely how someone gripped by this intuition is at the same time no longer an individual: the individual has lost himself in this very intuition: rather, he is the *pure*, will-less, painless, timeless *subject of cognition*. (WWR 1, 201/SW 2: 210–11)

But note a vital difference: while Plato's lover passionately desires the Form of Beauty, Schopenhauer's subject of aesthetic experience is dispassionate,

<sup>1</sup> *Symposium* 192e (in Cooper ed. 1997).

<sup>2</sup> MR 1, 467/HN 1, 422.

will-less, and gains not from fulfilling a desire, but from the tranquillity of will-lessness, a state in which no desire occupies consciousness at all. Such tranquillity is a release—while the suspension of aesthetic experience lasts—from individuality. But for Schopenhauer erotic love cannot work in the same way. For him, *erōs* is the antithesis of will-lessness: it remains mundane, biologically driven, and leads not to tranquillity but only to trouble.

However, there is another kind of love, which for Schopenhauer can convey someone towards a redemption from individuation. This is the ‘pure’ love that arises out of universal compassion for all beings, which he aligns with the Christian concepts of *agapē* and *caritas*, and makes the foundation of morality. In Sections 2 and 3 below I discuss these two kinds of love, and consider the contrasting values he assigns to them. In short, he seeks to unmask the erotic kind of love as worthless for the individual. Though the drive that underlies sexual love is rooted in our very being, we should, if we follow Schopenhauer, wish to be rid of it altogether. By contrast, the selfless, moral kind of love is of enormous value, not simply because it ameliorates the world’s sufferings, but in a more surprising way. To the extent that you act out of pure love towards others, you show yourself to be to some extent decentred away from the ‘I’, making less of a distinction between yourself and others.<sup>3</sup> Schopenhauer regards a character thus distanced from egoism as already on the path to extinction of desire and of the individual-self in consciousness. Such extinction is a higher good even than the value of acting morally, and so this kind of love is, perhaps paradoxically, something the individual should devoutly wish for.

In Section 4 I turn to Richard Wagner’s presentation of the lovers Tristan and Isolde, a spectacular case of love conceived as the longing for merged identity. In the renowned music drama that bears their name these characters desire to abandon all separation of self from non-self, to lose individuality in a state of highest bliss. Wagner’s enthusiastic and dedicated reading of Schopenhauer, which began in 1854, inspired this depiction of love. However, it has rightly been said that ‘Wagner’s engagement with Schopenhauer...was hardly that of an uncritical follower’ (Karnes and Mitchell 2020: 518). If what happens in *Tristan and Isolde* were intended as a straight transposition of Schopenhauer’s theory of love into art, we must judge it to be a misunderstanding. Mark Johnston, for instance, writes bluntly of ‘the mistake in *Tristan and Isolde*’, saying that ‘Schopenhauer would have found no place for *agape* in the context of erotic love’ (Johnston 2010: 346–7).

<sup>3</sup> See BM, 249/SW 4: 265.

The redemptive, trans-individual consciousness that Schopenhauer envisages is in principle never focused upon one unique individual, nor can it ever be born out of sexual attraction. However, Wagner did not simply make a mistake. Rather, he was deliberately set on rectifying Schopenhauer's philosophy, making a connection Schopenhauer had overlooked, so as to rehabilitate sexual love as the highest form of human fulfilment. Inspired by the way Schopenhauer 'wrote about sex with a kind of rhapsodic negativity',<sup>4</sup> Wagner created a greatly more inspiring vision of sexual love than Schopenhauer, and of course his vision is expressed through one of the most sublime artworks. I shall argue that nonetheless Wagner's intervention does not rectify or complete Schopenhauer's philosophy, so much as blow it apart. In that philosophy the two kinds of love must be held at a distance from one another because they have fundamentally different functions. As I show in Section 5, although both kinds of love trade on the alleged illusoriness of individuation, one is part of Schopenhauer's remedy for the human condition, while the other is part of his diagnosis of what is wrong with it.

## 2. Pure Love

When Schopenhauer first published *The World as Will and Representation* in 1818 he spoke of love in the context of Christian ethics. Christian ethics, he wrote, 'lead...to the highest degrees of love [*zu den höchsten Graden der Liebe*]' (WWR<sub>1818</sub>, 555). In the final edition of the book that he revised in 1859, he replaced *Liebe* with a more qualified term, now speaking of the highest degree of *Menschenliebe* (WWR 1, 413/SW 2: 456). The latter was the term he had also favoured in his essay *On the Basis of Morals* of 1841. It is hard to translate *Menschenliebe* well into English. *Menschen* are human beings, *Liebe* is love. A literal Anglo-Greek equivalent is 'philanthropy'. But this word has the connotation of charitable works and is less clearly a species of *love*. 'Human-love' or 'love of humanity' are not very elegant alternatives.<sup>5</sup> 'Loving kindness' is a compromise used in recent translations, though it does not fully bring out the fact that *Menschenliebe* is, linguistically at least, a kind of love, the kind that Schopenhauer links with Christian love,

<sup>4</sup> Heller 1985: 20.

<sup>5</sup> 'Love of humanity' would be misleading because it implicitly excludes non-human beings from the moral compass, which directly contravenes Schopenhauer's dominant concerns as an ethicist. See BM, 226–31/SW 4: 238–45; and Shapshay 2019.



expressed in the Latin *caritas* and the Greek *agapē*.<sup>6</sup> In his later editions Schopenhauer continues sometimes to speak simply of ‘love’ interchangeably with *Menschenliebe*, and also refers to it as ‘pure love’ (*reine Liebe*) or ‘pure, unselfish love’ (*reine, uneigennützige Liebe*) (WWR 1, 401–2/SW 2: 443–4).

*Menschenliebe* is one of the two basic moral virtues for Schopenhauer, the other being what he calls ‘genuine, freely willed, disinterested and unadorned justice’ (BM 207/SW 4: 216). All other moral virtues stem from *Menschenliebe* or justice, for Schopenhauer, and these two basic virtues are manifestations of the human incentive that he calls *Mitleid*, a term best rendered as ‘compassion’. As Schopenhauer makes clear in his essay on the basis of morals, compassion is the disposition to will the well-being of another individual pure and simple, and an action has moral worth if and only if it stems from this disposition. In *Menschenliebe*,

compassion does not merely hold me back from injuring the other but actually drives me on to help him. . . . I shall be moved by that purely moral motive to make a greater or lesser sacrifice for the other’s need or distress, a sacrifice that can consist in the exertion of my bodily or mental powers for him, in my property, in my health, freedom, and even in my life.

(BM, 216/SW 4: 227)

Aiming at any reward for oneself (either in this life or a supposed future existence) blights one’s chances of acting morally, because to act morally one must act solely for the benefit of the other, for its own sake.<sup>7</sup> However, acting morally also has a value for the agent because of a higher kind of selflessness that it enables.<sup>8</sup> Schopenhauer envisages a transition from acting morally to abolition or negation of the will. In acting morally, one is in a state of cognition that motivates willing directed not at the first-person individual, but at all individuals. In negation of the will, one reaches a state of cognition that motivates no willing. The greater the degree to which one is morally motivated—the greater the degree of one’s compassion—the more onerous one’s existence becomes. One would eventually ‘assume even the sufferings that originally fell to others, and . . . take on an even greater quantity of these sufferings than the individual would encounter in the normal course of events’, with the result that ‘attachment to life and its pleasures must soon

<sup>6</sup> See WWR 1, 401/SW 2: 443, 444; BM, 216, 217/SW 4: 227, 228.

<sup>7</sup> See BM, 217–18/SW 4: 228–9.

<sup>8</sup> For more on this issue, see Janaway 2016b (now Chapter 4 of this volume).

fade, and give way to a general renunciation: and thus appears the negation of the will' (WWR 2, 621–2/SW 3: 696). Human life would present itself as so awful that to attach value to what is gained or lost within its ebb and flow of willing would cease to make sense, and one would become motivationally inert. The truly moral *Menschenliebe* thus has value for its agent because it intimates and facilitates the eventual extinction of the individual-self in consciousness, helping to reveal to us the greater whole to which we can return from individuation's 'misstep'.

### 3. Sexual Love

The other species of *Liebe* is *Geschlechtsliebe*, which is more obviously translatable into English as 'sexual love'. Here we should think not just of a simple desire for sexual activity or gratification. The phenomenon Schopenhauer addresses is, he says, best described in *Romeo and Juliet*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and Goethe's *Werther*—and we can surely add the case of Tristan and Isolde to the list. He is talking about the exceptional state of *Verliebtheit*, being in love, and limits his discussion to heterosexual instances of this condition.<sup>9</sup> This state of love between woman and man is rooted in the sex drive (*Geschlechtstrieb*), but not reducible to it. Schopenhauer distinguishes sex drive (*Geschlechtstrieb*) from sexual love (*Geschlechtsliebe*).<sup>10</sup> The sex drive is the primary manifestation of what Schopenhauer calls will to life, and he equates it with 'the will' that is the unitary essence or nature common to all individuals. Schopenhauer says 'sex drive is the kernel of the will to life, and thus all willing itself in concentrated form . . . . Indeed, one can say that the human being is the sex drive made concrete' (WWR 2, 530/SW 3: 587). For Schopenhauer, the aim of this drive is reproduction, the propagation of the species. Though reproduction may be entertained as a conscious aim by individuals involved in sexual activity, what is more important for Schopenhauer is that, whether they know it or not, individuals are at all

<sup>9</sup> Schopenhauer does not ignore male homosexuality, which he discusses under the concept of pederasty. If, as Schopenhauer supposes, the sex drive in a general sense exists for the purpose of reproduction, same-sex intercourse poses an anomaly. Schopenhauer's answer is that pederasty is nature's way of channelling the sex drive away from reproduction in cases where the individuals concerned are less fit to reproduce. See WWR 2, 576–82/SW 3: 643–51, an appendix added as something of an afterthought in 1859.

<sup>10</sup> Sandford 2019: 91 links *Geschlechtstrieb* erroneously with the translation 'sexual love', and goes to the extent of reporting the title of Schopenhauer's whole essay as '*Metaphysik der Geschlechtstrieb*', when the true title is *Metaphysik der Geschlechtsliebe*.

times manifesting an instinctive drive which transcends their individual consciousness. Through the instrument of their individual desires and actions, a 'will of the species' (*Wille der Gattung*) is at work, driving them towards procreation.<sup>11</sup>

Sexual love arises out of this ubiquitous drive, but has a remarkable selectivity of focus—it trains extreme desire and minute attentiveness upon a single individual. While 'mere sex drive is base because it is directed to everyone and not individualized' (WWR 2, 565/SW 3: 630), sexual love is 'more precisely determined, specialized, and (in the strongest sense) individualized' (WWR 2, 549/SW 3: 610). The drive becomes intensified into an 'excessive passion'. Then 'individualization, and with it the intensity of being in love, can reach such a high pitch that if it is not satisfied, then everything good in the world, indeed life itself, loses its value' (WWR 2, 565–6/SW 3: 630). In other words, in the consciousness of one human individual another human individual can become such an important and irreplaceable object of desire that other objects of desire, including even being alive, are no longer recognized as having value for the individual. Schopenhauer observes that individuals in love are sometimes driven even to madness, homicide, or suicide by the intensity of their passion, as they are in some of the fictional cases he names.

A simple formula to characterize Schopenhauer's picture of sexual love is: sex drive + delusion. The function of the intensely individualized sexual love is still reproductive: it serves the end of producing superior human specimens in the succeeding generation. For Schopenhauer believes that in heterosexual relations people are most powerfully attracted to the one with whom they can produce fitter offspring. He expounds this theory in great detail, itemizing the age ranges, skeletal features, complexions, shapes of noses, and so on, that are preferred by the will of the species as it pairs up human individuals.<sup>12</sup> Whereas sexual drive as such uses individuals simply as a means to reproducing more units of humanity, sexual love is about quality, not quantity: it is a means to enhancing the species generation by generation. Yet, for the individual who feels the passion of *Geschlechtsliebe*, or for the recipient of such passion, there is no direct value at all. The will of the species succeeds by *deluding* the individual into the belief that he or she stands to gain something of value from the whole exercise. Sheer relief of sexual appetite may occur in happier cases (if this is ever the right word for Schopenhauer), but that is something

<sup>11</sup> See WWR 2, 555, 557, 571, 573/SW 3: 612, 619, 636–7, 639.

<sup>12</sup> See WWR 2, 558–64/SW 3: 621–8.

transitory, and is common to other exercises of the sexual drive, not specific to being in love. Being in love does not, in Schopenhauer's view, deliver the bliss of high personal fulfilment it appears to promise. He thinks that once the will of the species has been fulfilled the illusion lapses:

each lover will, after finally achieving pleasure, experience an incredible disappointment and be amazed that such a longed-for desire provides nothing more than every other sexual satisfaction; so that he does not see that it helps him much. . . . Thus, after the consummation of the great enterprise, every lover will find he has been fooled: because the delusion that made the individual the dupe of the species has vanished.

(WWR 2, 557/SW 3: 619)

One might go on to form a successful and rewarding relationship with the object of one's desire, because one shares their likes and dislikes, appreciates their intellect, finds them a good companion, and so on, but those are not goods that arise from being in love as such. Being in love brings no peculiar value of its own to the individual lover, and is a good only because of its benefit to the species through the quality of the unborn offspring that is likely to result from love's consummation.

In Schopenhauer's view, the delusion occurs because the psychological mechanism of *Geschlechtsliebe* works at the level of the individual's egoism. Egoism is naturally dominant in human beings:

*Egoism* is, by its nature, boundless; the human being unconditionally wills to preserve his existence, wills it unconditionally free from pains, . . . wills every pleasure of which he is capable, and even seeks where possible to develop new capacities for pleasure. . . . In line with this, each one makes himself the mid-point of the world. (BM, 190/SW 4: 196–7)

Schopenhauer's idea is that *Geschlechtsliebe* relies on this naturally dominant egoism, the state in which we identify with the ends, the pleasure and the fulfilment of what Schopenhauer calls our 'person'—the one individuated human being we regard ourselves to be—and it trades on our natural conviction that attaining the unique individual object of desire can be a good for this individual that we are. *Geschlechtsliebe* relies on a human being's retaining the natural, unreformed consciousness characteristic of individuals, and yet it does so only in the service of a value that bypasses the individual entirely:

egoistic goals are the only ones that can be relied upon to arouse an individual being into action....And so in such a case, nature can only achieve its aim by implanting a certain delusion [*Wahn*] in the individual that makes what in truth is good only for the species appear to be good for the individual, so that the individual serves the species when he thinks he is serving himself. (WWR 2, 554/SW 3: 616)

The explanatory primacy of the greater will, of which the individual is a mere facet, shows the individual to be both powerless, driven by the upsurging force of nature at large, and necessarily blind to what is really happening. Though you continue to believe that you pursue a goal uniquely valuable to yourself, a larger will that permeates nature is using you, the individual, for ends which are not your own.

#### 4. Wagner's 'Schopenhauerian' Love Story

As we said above, Tristan and Isolde are another pair of lovers we might easily add to Schopenhauer's fictional examples of the extremes of *Verliebtheit*. In his letters to Mathilde Wesendonck during 1858–9, Wagner makes many warm references to Schopenhauer, or 'friend Schopenhauer' (though the two never met) and reports how he is rereading the philosopher as he works to complete *Tristan and Isolde*. In the finished music drama, Wagner envelops the love narrative in layers of metaphysical symbolism inspired at least in part by Schopenhauer. So is this the first great Schopenhauerian love story? And will it help us to build a positive, redeeming account of sexual love from Schopenhauerian materials?

Discussing the words Wagner gives to his characters in abstraction from the music is not the most fruitful way to appreciate Wagner's achievement. As Roger Scruton puts it, 'The words that the lovers sing in act 2 are elaborations on the theme of metaphysical union...but taken by themselves they are almost nonsensical, a kind of breathless incantation that weaves itself around the notes as though digressing upon and ornamenting their core of unsayable sense' (Scruton 2004: 33–4). Nonetheless, these words that the characters sing over the overwhelmingly powerful music of Scene 2 of Act 2 convey an important element of their extraordinary state of mind. They implore the 'night of love' to sink down upon them, to free them from the world, and obliterate delusion. The opposition day/night is used as a multilayered

metaphor throughout this scene.<sup>13</sup> At one level 'day' is the public world in which Tristan and Isolde have their well-defined social roles. In that world their love is forbidden and treacherous. Night is a retreat into an intimate space where social roles can be abandoned. But metaphysics is also in play. Day is a world of *Schein*, brightness or false appearance, and of delusion, *Wahn*, the term that Schopenhauer had also used. Night is a condition that removes the false appearance, and reveals the lovers not as two distinct individuals, but as one. Their utterances strive to express this revelation in various terms: 'I am the world', 'one consciousness', 'I am Isolde' (sings Tristan), 'I am Tristan' (sings Isolde). So the lovers undergo a radical, violent shift in consciousness, one that puts their own existence as individuals in question. Their desire is to abandon all separation of self from non-self, to lose a false sense of individuality and enter a state of bliss. So they are singing a Schopenhauerian text—to an extent.

The theme of erotic love culminating in extinction in fact harks back to German Romanticism rather than Schopenhauer.<sup>14</sup> Schopenhauer does not follow Novalis's idea that 'for the lover, death is a bridal night.'<sup>15</sup> He mentions, as we saw, that lovers are often driven to death as a consequence of their extreme passion. He also holds that dying is a rectification of the misstep of individuation, the opportunity 'not to be I any longer' (WWR 2, 524/SW 3: 582). But these pieces do not add up to the Romantic whole that Wagner enacted in the *Liebestod*, the ecstatic fulfilment of erotic love in death. For Schopenhauer, '[t]o die willingly, gladly, joyfully is the prerogative of someone who is resigned, who has relinquished and negated the will to life' (WWR 2, 525/SW 3: 583). Although Wagner's lovers have relinquished their attachment to individuality, they have reached that point through their intensified sexual desire, so rather than relinquishing and negating the will to life, they have embodied and affirmed it to the highest degree. Schopenhauerian redemption from individuality requires absence of focus on an individual other, absence of desire, and certainly absence of *sexual* desire. To him, the idea of redemption *from* willing through the experience of the most powerful and pernicious form of willing would seem absurd—unless as a kind of cure by aversion, which is certainly not what Wagner has in mind.

Wagner explained his thinking to Mathilde Wesendonck in December 1858:

Recently I have slowly read through friend Schopenhauer's chief work once again, and this time he has stimulated me enormously to an expansion

<sup>13</sup> On this see Scruton 2004: 51; and next note.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by Mann 1985: 124.

<sup>14</sup> Mann 1985: 124–6; May 2011b: 171–4.

and—in some particulars—to a correction of his system... It concerns something that no philosopher, not even Schopenhauer himself, has recognized: showing the path of salvation that leads to the total quietening of the will through love, and moreover not through an abstract *Menschenliebe*, but through a love that really germinates out of the ground of *Geschlechtsliebe*, i.e. the attraction between man and woman. What is decisive is that to this end I can use (as philosopher—not as poet, for as poet I have my own) the material of the concepts that Schopenhauer himself gives me. ... I manage to show with the greatest sureness the possibility of attaining in love that elevation above the individual drive of the will, where after the total conquest of the latter the will of the species comes to full consciousness of itself, which at this high level is necessarily synonymous with total quietening. It will be possible for all this to become clear even to someone without the experience, if my presentation succeeds. But then the result must be highly significant, and fill the lacunas in Schopenhauer's system completely and satisfyingly.<sup>16</sup>

Wagner even drafted a letter to Schopenhauer in which he wrote:

I would like to flatter myself by...telling you about a view of my own, according to which the natural tendency to sexual love represents a way to salvation, to self-knowledge, and to self-negation of the will.... You alone give me the conceptual resources through which it becomes possible to communicate my opinion philosophically.<sup>17</sup>

The letter was never sent. Had he ever received it, we know that Schopenhauer would not have been impressed.

Apart from that fact that Schopenhauer's two kinds of love are wholly distinct, there is something awry in Wagner's invocation of 'the natural tendency to sexual love'. The orientation of Schopenhauer's whole philosophy resists the idea that a *natural* tendency should provide the route to salvation: salvation for him 'can only be achieved by the most difficult sacrifice and denial of one's own self, and so by a complete overturning of human nature' (WWR 2, 641/SW 3: 719); it occurs 'by means of the negation of the will, that is, by assuming a decisive stand in opposition to nature' (WWR 2, 644/SW 3: 723). Nature is to be overcome, not used as a vehicle. However, for Wagner, and probably for many other readers, Schopenhauer's vivid description of our nature as will, with that 'rhapsodic negativity' about the will's focus in the sex drive,

<sup>16</sup> Golther 1904: 79–80 (my translation).

<sup>17</sup> Trans. Boris Kment, in Johnston 2010: 347 n. 20.

makes such a strong impression that the subsequent message about opposing one's nature pales by comparison. Wagner knew that message was there, but felt able to disregard it.

From Schopenhauer's point of view, there is a further problem with Wagner's proposal. Wagner advocates

the possibility of attaining in love that elevation above the individual drive of the will, where after the total conquest of the latter the will of the species comes to full consciousness of itself, which at this high level is necessarily synonymous with total quietening. (Golther 1904: 80)

Wagner talks of a 'quietening' [*Beruhigung*] here, presumably thinking that once the lover's consciousness is disabused of the illusion that his or her individuality is basic, his or her consciousness would become blissfully released from the neediness and striving that attaches to individuality. But in Schopenhauer the will of the species is the organism's instinctive drive towards procreation of the best possible offspring. If that drive were to come to full consciousness of itself, the illusion involved in being in love would fall away. Instead of idealizing the love object as something unique and special, the individual would glimpse the unsavoury truth that he or she is just the instrument of an impersonal biological species impulse, bent on producing a better class of offspring. This self-consciousness on the part of the will of the species would dissolve the sense of individual autonomy and the attainment of egoistic ends, but the psychological effect would be deflation rather than elevation, frustration rather than quietening. Being fully conscious of oneself as a reproductive mechanism being manipulated by nature at large would shatter the sense of being in love.

## 5. Disturbing Diagnosis and Redeeming Remedy

Wagner made a great effort to 'fill lacunas' in Schopenhauer's system. But, as a correction of that system, the effort fails. The system is structured around two fundamentally opposed ways in which the individual is viewed as less real than a greater whole. We can see this by pressing the question: if individuality is not ultimately real, what is the primordial unity with which it contrasts? At least superficially, the answer seems easy to find: the world, the reality that lies behind the alleged 'error' of individuation, is *the will*. But if the world-whole is will, commentators have asked, why does Schopenhauer say that the 'purpose



of life' is to bring us back from the 'error' of individuality to a reunification (of some kind) precisely with this will, which he portrays as something dreadful: a blind, rapacious striving without end or point, the ultimate source of all the horrors and miseries of life? How would I be better off being reabsorbed into this primordial force? And how could the redemptive *negation* of the will occur through *identification* with this will? There is a kind of solution to these worries, if the whole into which the individual is redeemed need not be the will.

We have here a collision of two tectonic plates, two large-scale strategies that give Schopenhauer's system its structure. I shall call them the Disturbing Diagnosis and the Redeeming Remedy. The message of the Disturbing Diagnosis is addressed to the ordinary human individual, whose unreformed outlook places confidence in his or her existence as an individual and in the satisfaction of those desires that pertain to that individual. In one of his many images, Schopenhauer compares the individual to a weak little vessel afloat in a boundless sea (see WWR 1, 379/SW 2: 416–17). You, the individual—he says—place trust in your 'vanishing little person', make it the centre of value, think of it as the locus of something you call happiness, as if attaining the ends of this one particular part of the world were of some consequence. But you are really at the mercy of an overpowering natural force, the will, of which you are but one tiny manifestation. This makes you an instrument or plaything of nature at large: that you have desires and needs is not of your choosing, what you desire is determined by factors you cannot alter, and that you fail to satisfy your persistent willing is guaranteed by your essence. As a subject, you are neither in control, nor even fundamentally real. That Schopenhauer means this to be a disturbing message is shown by the violent terms in which he portrays the will: it makes the world a 'battleground of tormented and anxious beings who survive only by devouring one other, where every predatory animal is the living grave of thousands of others and its self-preservation is a chain of excruciating deaths' (WWR 2, 596/SW 3: 665). But irrespective of this lurid characterization, Schopenhauer suggests that the merest inkling of individuation's breaking down induces a 'dread' (*Grausen*, WWR 1, 379/SW 2: 417) in the ordinary human being.

But then we are offered the remedy for the human condition, the self-negation or self-abolition of the will. For someone in this transformed state the sense of self alters, all egoistic motivation ceases and they detach themselves from valuing the individual human being or person they happen to be. Here, as with the Advaita Vedānta position Schopenhauer wishes to side with, there is a primal Oneness, an absolute, with which the subject is reunited in consciousness. But, as the neo-Vedānta philosopher Vivekananda observed,

this absolute Oneness ought not to be conceived as will. In ‘Buddhism and Vedānta’ (1896), Vivekananda stated, ‘There is something which is not will, but is manifesting itself as will. That I can understand. But that will is manifesting itself, I do not understand.’<sup>18</sup> If we thus separate the will from the absolute, the Disturbing Diagnosis and the Redeeming Remedy come more clearly into focus as contrasting strategies. The single essence of nature that undermines our security as individuals need not be identified with the single ultimate reality into which we are absorbed to escape our individuality. By continually proclaiming that the will is the thing in itself, Schopenhauer makes it hard to maintain this separation. But a passage in Volume 2 of *The World as Will and Representation* states a contrary view, by distinguishing ultimate reality from the reality we can cognize at the most general level, and locating the will only in the latter, foreground position:

[T]he thing in itself (which we cognize most directly in willing) may have—entirely outside of any possible appearance—determinations, properties, and ways of being that entirely elude our grasp or cognition, but which would remain as the essence of the thing in itself even when . . . it has freely annulled itself as *will*. (WWR 2, 209/SW2: 221–2)

If we take this distinction seriously and read it back into everything Schopenhauer has said, then in ceasing to will as individuals we must think of reuniting not with the will, but with the unsayable absolute that lies beyond the will. On this reading, which we must accept if we are to make good sense of Schopenhauer’s redemptive transcendence of individuality, it becomes even clearer that where Wagner thought there was a lacuna there is in fact a very deliberate chasm that cannot be filled without leaving Schopenhauer’s system behind. The account of *Geschlechtsliebe* is part of the Disturbing Diagnosis, the account of *Menschenliebe* the first glimmering of the Redeeming Remedy. One is redeemed by transcending one’s individuality—yes, but the will of the species, the will that runs through the whole of nature and shows up in each individual, is precisely what stands in the way.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Vivekananda 2007: 279–80. For commentary, see Maharaj 2017: 1198–209; Janaway (2022).

<sup>19</sup> It must be acknowledged that Schopenhauer not only states repeatedly that the thing in itself is will, but in one passage explicitly includes under ‘phenomena . . . based on this metaphysical identity of the will as thing in itself. . . (1) compassion, which . . . is the basis of justice and loving kindness, *caritas*; (2) sexual love, with its obstinate selectivity, *amor*, which is the life of the species and maintains its precedence over the individual’ (WWR 2, 617/SW 3: 691). In light of such evidence, the line argued for in this chapter must be defended as a reconstruction that makes best sense of Schopenhauer’s notion of redemption.

## 6. Conclusion

We have seen that Wagner was not mistaken about Schopenhauer's view of love. He grasped the distinction between Schopenhauer's two kinds of love, expressly differentiating *Geschlechtsliebe* and *Menschenliebe* is his explanation of the philosophical aims of *Tristan and Isolde*. But he also did not follow Schopenhauer slavishly, because he thought he had a better idea. Schopenhauer acknowledges that sexual love can present itself as the greatest fulfilment of human life, and as a union that redeems one from the isolation of individuality, but he deflates this presentation as a cruel and humiliating illusion. Wagner clearly wanted to restore sexual love to pride of place, showing that its redemptive power was real rather than illusory. So he took the Schopenhauerian template of a love that leads to blissful elevation beyond individuality, and filled it with sexual love instead of what he saw as 'abstract *Menschenliebe*'. Where he went wrong was in thinking that he had put Schopenhauer's philosophy into better shape. For Schopenhauer, as long as the will expresses itself in sexual desire we cannot attain the bliss of will-lessness. The temptation to think otherwise arises from the fact that both in the redemption of will-lessness and in the process of sexual love Schopenhauer contrasts the human individual with some greater, undivided reality. But, as I have argued, in Schopenhauer's system the greater 'will of the species' is part of his Disturbing Diagnosis, showing us that we are a mere facet of a nature that dooms us never to be fulfilled. It is precisely this nature that must be overcome in the Redemptive Remedy of will-less consciousness, where the individual reunites with a greater whole that has 'annulled itself as will'. Thus in *Tristan and Isolde* Wagner's considerable achievements do not include 'correcting' or 'completing' Schopenhauer's philosophical system. He just used materials he found in Schopenhauer to create something extraordinary and different.

# Schopenhauer's Consoling View of Death

## 1. Introduction

Dale Jacquette's open-mindedness and versatility as a philosopher are reflected in his extensive work on the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer.<sup>1</sup> I hope it will not seem inappropriate to begin from the contribution Jacquette chose to make to a volume on Schopenhauer that I edited some years ago, a piece entitled 'Schopenhauer on Death'.

Schopenhauer is preoccupied with death to an extent that perhaps few modern Western philosophers have been. As Jacquette says, 'Schopenhauer dwells morbidly on the inevitability of death' (1999: 298) and reminds us that every moment is a step nearer to it, even going so far as to call it the purpose or aim (*Zweck*) of life. Indeed, says Schopenhauer, living really is just a slow process of dying anyway:

just as we know that walking is a continuously checked falling, the life of our body is only a constantly checked dying, a constant postponement of death . . . Every breath we take wards off the perpetual onslaught of death; in this way, we struggle against death at every moment, and again at greater intervals, with every meal, every sleep, every time we warm ourselves, etc. Death has to win in the end: because we have been cast into death ever since birth, and it is only playing with its prey for a while before devouring it.

(WWR 1, 337–8/SW 2: 367)

The fear of death tends to be overwhelming for human beings, but Schopenhauer states that this fear cannot be rational (or at least wholly rational) in origin, for one thing because animals similarly fear death in the absence of any knowledge that they will die. The elemental fear of death must lie in something common to humans and other animals—this he calls the will to life (*Wille zum Leben*), arguing that it constitutes the essence of all living

<sup>1</sup> See items listed under 'Jacquette' in the Bibliography. (Additional note: This essay was first published in a volume commemorating Dale Jacquette, who had died in 2016.)

things. The will to life is not fundamentally a conscious *desire* for life. It is more akin to an innate disposition or drive, an elemental, pre-rational attachment or striving for life—and it is because we are an embodiment of this drive that the fear of life's ending is so ingrained in us. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer believes that this natural attachment to life need not have the last word, and offers us what he considers a consoling view of death. One considerable difficulty for the interpreter of Schopenhauer, however, is that the nature of the consolation on offer can be hard to fathom. On the one hand, Schopenhauer seems to be urging that death can be welcomed as an annihilation that releases us from the trouble involved in existing. On the other hand, he claims that something about us is not destroyed when we die. In what follows I shall seek to unpack this apparent duality by examining Schopenhauer's complex conception of the self.

Culturally prevalent views on this topic tend to 'vacillate between the view of death as an absolute annihilation and the assumption that we are immortal, flesh, blood and all', says Schopenhauer, but, he continues, 'Both are equally false: and we do not need to find a correct middle ground but rather a higher perspective from which both ideas fall away of their own accord' (WWR 2, 481/SW 3: 530). In Schopenhauer's view, the worst doctrine concerning death is that traditionally associated with Christianity, that each individual comes into existence 'out of nothing' at some point in time, but then goes on existing forever. Against this he states:

anyone who considers a person's birth to be his absolute beginning must consider his death to be his absolute end. For both are what they are in the same sense: consequently, we can only think of ourselves as immortal to the extent that we think of ourselves as unborn, and in the same sense... The assumption that a human being is created out of nothing leads necessarily to the idea that death is his absolute end. (WWR 2, 503–4/SW 3: 558)

Far preferable to Schopenhauer are the ideas he finds in Indian thought (though giving them Greek names): metempsychosis (transmigration of souls) and pal-ingensis (rebirth). He does not regard these doctrines as literally true, since in his ontology there are no such things as souls. However, as allegories, these doctrines graphically represent the idea that something fundamental to me both survives and predates the existence of the particular individual I identify myself as. But before we attempt to illuminate the nature of this surviving 'something', let us address the central question whether, given Schopenhauer's views, we even *should* desire anything of ourselves to survive death.

## 2. Why Not Make Life Briefer?

Schopenhauer is famous for his claim that life consists of suffering, and indeed for his claim that because of this it would have been better not to have existed (see, e.g. WWR 2, 507–8; 588–92/SW 3: 563, 657–8). This latter claim that has often been treated, since the time of his greatest influence in the nineteenth century,<sup>2</sup> as the epitome of the pessimism with which his name is linked. And yet in his well-known treatment of suicide, Schopenhauer insists that it is a mistake to terminate one's life because of its sufferings. Taking his departure from this treatment of suicide, Jacquette wrote of 'deep contradictions' in Schopenhauer's attitude to death:

If the goal of philosophy is to reconcile individual will to the misery of existence and the elimination of consciousness in unreal death as the end and purpose of unreal life, then it appears impossible to explain why anyone should prefer death to a life of even the most acute turmoil, suffering, and pain. If the aim of life is death, and if death is unreal, then why should the philosopher not hasten to it?. (Jacquette 1999: 313)

Leaving aside for the moment the notion that death is 'unreal', Jacquette is here pointing to a kind of dilemma for Schopenhauer. On the one hand, it seems that death is something to be welcomed. It is, as Schopenhauer says, a 'liberation' from life, and more dramatically 'the great opportunity not to be I any longer' (WWR 2, 524/SW 3: 582). Hence one should say to a dying person, 'you are ceasing to be something that it would have been better for you never to have become' (WWR 2, 517/SW 3: 574).

But if so, why not take that opportunity as soon as you can? As Jacquette puts it, 'once we get the picture, why not make life briefer?' (Jacquette 2000: 46). Assuming that suicide results in non-existence, it would seem inconsistent on Schopenhauer's part to claim that life is worse than non-existence, and to condemn suicide; yet this is what he does. For while he urges a sympathetic attitude towards those who take their own lives,<sup>3</sup> he nonetheless argues that intentionally bringing about one's own death is 'morally' objectionable in one particular way:

<sup>2</sup> See Plümacher 1888: 124, for the view that philosophical pessimism as inaugurated by Schopenhauer is the view that non-being would be preferable to being.

<sup>3</sup> On the suicide of Schopenhauer's own father and its lasting influence on the philosopher, see Cartwright 2010: 87–94.

[T]he only relevant moral reason against suicide...lies in the fact that suicide is counter to achieving the highest moral goal insofar as it substitutes a merely illusory redemption from this world of misery for the real one. But it is still a very long way from this error to a crime, which is what the Christian clergy want to make it out to be. (PP 2, 279/SW 6: 328)

Jacquette conveys our likely response:

Is Schopenhauer's conclusion necessitated by or even logically consistent with the concept of death he has elaborated? Or is Schopenhauer, having offered a powerful motivation for self-destruction, merely trying awkwardly now within his pessimistic and arguably nihilistic philosophical system to accommodate the squeamishness of traditional morality about the problem of suicide?. (Jacquette 2000: 46)

However, to comprehend Schopenhauer's objection to suicide we need to probe further into his system of values. He speaks of suicide's hindering a 'real redemption' from the world, and we must seek to understand what that is supposed to comprise. For Schopenhauer, it comprises what he calls the negation of the will to life. In a passage that has puzzled many readers, he explains that

[f]ar from being a negation of the will, [suicide] is a phenomenon of a strong affirmation of will. This is because negation is not essentially an abhorrence of the *suffering* of life, but an abhorrence of its *pleasures*. The person who commits suicide wills life, and is only unsatisfied with the conditions under which life has been given to him. Thus, when he destroys the individual appearance he is relinquishing only life, not the will to life. He wills life, wills the unimpeded existence and affirmation of his body, but the tangle of circumstances does not allow him this and he undergoes great suffering.

(WWR 1, 425–6/SW 2: 471)

The crucial point to take from this is that there is more than one axis of evaluation in play for Schopenhauer. One issue is whether the individual continues existing or not. On this score, let us assume (provisionally at least) that for Schopenhauer—because of his negative evaluation of existence—there is positive value (for the individual) in the individual's ceasing to exist. But the other axis of value lies in whether one adopts the attitude of affirmation or negation towards life. Schopenhauer places the *highest* value on negation of the will to life, an attitude that we might also call *non-attachment* to the goods of ordinary

individual existence. The human being, as a living thing, is naturally set up to have desires, wishes, impulses that tend towards the well-being or happiness of the bodily individual that they ordinarily identify themselves as. Schopenhauer captures the unreconstructed human outlook in a famous simile:

Just as a captain sits in a boat, trusting the weak little vessel as the raging, boundless sea raises up and casts down howling cliffs of waves; so the human individual sits calmly in a world full of sorrow, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis*, which is how the individual cognizes things as appearance. (WWR 1, 379/SW 2: 416–17)

The *principium individuationis* comprises simply space and time: the individuality of a human being, is, like that of any other empirical thing, its distinctness in terms of spatio-temporal location. But as individual living things, and more specifically as individual human beings, we are egoistic by nature, in Schopenhauer's view. Egoism is endemic in every individual, as a central hard-wired disposition. It is 'linked... with his innermost core and essence, and indeed is properly identical with it', and in consequence 'the human being unconditionally wills to preserve his existence, wills it unconditionally free from pains, ... wills every pleasure of which he is capable' (BM, 190/SW 4: 196). This fundamental orientation of human desire stems from the will to life that is our essence. Affirmation of the will to life is our default state, and is manifest simply in our pursuing our naturally arising desires. Non-human animals also affirm the will to life in this immediate way. But a more reflective affirmation of the will to life arises when human beings come to regard the attainment of desires centred on the well-being, or *happiness*, of the individual as the locus of genuine value.

But Schopenhauer argues that it is a mistake to locate genuine value there. Such happiness through individual desire satisfaction is always receding from us and can never be complete. By contrast, will-lessness (*Willenslosigkeit*), or absence of will, has a finality about it that makes it of higher value, in Schopenhauer's view:

we might figuratively<sup>4</sup> call the complete self-abolition and negation of the will, the true absence of will, the only thing that can staunch and appease the

<sup>4</sup> I shall not discuss here the question why Schopenhauer thinks there can be a highest good only 'figuratively'. On this, Janaway 2016b (now Ch. 4 of this volume) and, for alternative interpretations, Migotti 1995; Reginster 2012: 355–6.



impulses of the will forever, the only thing that can give everlasting contentment, the only thing that can redeem the world, . . . —we might call this the absolute good, the *summum bonum*. We can look upon it as the one radical cure for the disease against which all other goods—such as fulfilled wishes and achieved happiness—are only palliatives, only anodynes.

(WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 428)

For Schopenhauer the attainment of such a state of mind, which he here calls contentment (*Zufriedenheit*) and elsewhere blissfulness (*Seligkeit*),<sup>5</sup> is of the utmost importance. The relevance of this notion to our discussion of suicide is that, while Schopenhauer may hold that death is a desirable liberation for any human being, he does not hold that all such cases of liberation are equally valuable, independently of their psychological context. Bringing about one's own death because one's ego-centred wishes are unfulfilled and one's happiness is unachieved will be a symptom of one's remaining attached to the will to life, of one's values remaining centred upon the individual and its desires. A person in such a state fails to attain the contentment (we might even say the enlightenment) that constitutes the highest good. Thus while extinction in death might be a good for the tormented individual, blissful detachment from his or her individual desires would be a higher good: and to attain such contentment one must be alive and face the suffering life brings.

In Schopenhauer's view, then, suicide attains a good, but if undertaken by the unenlightened, naturally egoistic person who has fallen into despair (and Schopenhauer makes the plausible implicit assumption that this is the most common kind of case), it cuts short the path to something more valuable. 'Someone who commits suicide is like a sick person who, having started undergoing a painful operation that could cure him completely, does not allow it to be completed and would rather stay sick' (WWR 1, 427/SW 2: 472–3). The 'painful operation' that can be a step towards negation of the will to life is a life of suffering, and the sickness is life itself. Attaining the alleged resulting will-less blissfulness in life is preferable to dying unenlightened. This is further confirmed by Schopenhauer's noteworthy *approval* of a particular kind of suicide, namely a passive 'death by voluntary starvation that emerges at the highest levels of asceticism' in which 'the complete negation of the will can reach the point where even the will needed to maintain the vegetative functions of the body through nutrition can fall away' (WWR 1, 428/SW 2: 474). The total ascetic, or life-denying 'saint', may achieve such a radical lack of

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. WWR 1, 389, 401, 417, 419/SW 2: 428, 442, 461, 464.

concern for self-preservation, and for him or her the state of will-lessness would matter far more than the choice of death. Thus the contradiction that we suspected in Schopenhauer's position does not really arise. It is coherent to say both that death is always to be welcomed as a release from life, and that releasing oneself from life while fixated on the attainment or non-attainment of individual happiness is a failure to attain the highest good.

However, this last case, that of self-induced death through ascetic abstinence, raises other alarm bells, not only about its desirability, but about its coherence within Schopenhauer's account. Jacquette pursues other contradictions here: 'for a subject to have any sort of preference about living or dying contradicts what is supposed to be the saint's absolute indifference to life and death' (Jacquette 2000: 54). Death cannot be something we want or approve of, if we are truly will-less. If we assume that the enlightened ascetic or 'saint' has already gained the 'liberation' that consists in negation of the will, then he or she cannot *prefer* death as a release, and so cannot coherently be described as dying voluntarily. In response, however, we may point out that Schopenhauer regards the saint as having to struggle to maintain will-lessness. An absolutely stable ascetic saint (could such a being exist) might indeed attain a complete indifference between living and dying. For him or her the state of complete indifference would be the good, and death through cessation of willing would be merely a by-product that gave evidence of that good's having been attained. But Schopenhauer seems to acknowledge that this extreme state is not really possible of attainment:

the peace and blissfulness we have described in the lives of saintly people is only a flower that emerges from the constant overcoming of the will, and we see the constant struggle with the will to life as the soil from which it arises . . . . Thus we also see people who have succeeded at some point in negating the will bend all their might to hold to this path by wresting renunciations of every sort from themselves, by adopting a difficult, penitent way of life and seeking out everything they find unpleasant: anything in order to subdue the will that will always strive anew. (WWR 1, 418–19/SW 2: 463)

While this seems to posit a distinct kind of willing that desires to be free of the will to life, (thereby shifting the lurking suspicion of contradiction now on to the notion of a 'complete' will-lessness), it does at least suggest that life is always going to involve some kind of struggle, either to satisfy one's egoistic will, or to lose it. And from either kind of struggle death can still be a welcome release.

### 3. Epicurean Arguments

So far we have assumed that for Schopenhauer, given his view that life is essentially composed of suffering and otherwise empty of positive value, non-existence would be a kind of positive good, though not the highest good. But there is a possible alternative to this position, namely that death, assuming that it is non-existence, can be neither good nor bad for the person who dies, whoever they are. Schopenhauer expounds some oft-expressed Epicurean arguments, the argument from the symmetry of non-existence post-death and pre-birth—‘It is irrefutably certain that non-being after death can be no different from non-being prior to birth, and therefore no more lamentable. An entire infinity has passed when we did not yet exist: but this does not upset us in the least’ (WWR 2, 483/SW 3: 532–3)—and the argument from consciousness:

it is in and of itself absurd to consider non-being an evil since every evil, like every good, presupposes existence and indeed consciousness; and consciousness comes to an end when life ends, as it does in sleep or in a faint; and so the absence of consciousness is no evil . . . . *Epicurus* considered death from this perspective and thus said quite rightly *ὁ θάνατος μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς* (death is nothing to us); with the explanation that when we are, death is not, and when death is, we are not . . . . It is clearly no evil to lose what we cannot miss: and so passing into non-existence ought to trouble us no more than not having been. So from the standpoint of cognition there does not appear to be any reason at all to fear death: but consciousness consists in cognition; and so death is no evil for cognition. (WWR 2, 484–5/SW 3: 534)

The emphasis here is on ‘no evil’; but note that Schopenhauer also inserts the corollary ‘like every good’. The upshot should be that for any time at which we do not exist, the state of affairs pertaining then can be neither good nor bad for us. And it cannot be rational to fear a state that can be neither good nor bad for us.

However, this Epicurean position does not provide a stable conclusion for Schopenhauer. There are two reasons for this. First, he thinks that the rationality or otherwise of fearing a state in which we do not exist could be decisive for us only if we were pure, rational intellects. As he explains,

in fact it is not this *cognitive* part of our I that fears death—rather, the flight from death that fills all living things comes only from the blind will. But, as

mentioned above, this flight is essential to the will, just because it is the will to life, and its entire essence consists in the urge to life and existence.

(WWR 2, 485/SW 3: 534)

The self is complex: we are, in one aspect of ourselves, a 'pure subject of cognition' that passively witnesses the world, and can look upon the world as a 'cold and disinterested spectator' (WWR 2, 291/SW 3: 314). If the 'I' were only that conscious spectator, its own non-existence would not matter to it. But the 'I' also comprises the living, willing individual, in whom the striving for life and its apparent goods is endemic, and this more fundamental part of the self will not so easily be persuaded out of its aversion to life's ending.

Secondly, Schopenhauer's position contains an implicit rejection of the Epicurean view, since he says not that non-existence is neither good nor bad, but rather 'every individuality is only a special error, a misstep, something that would be better off not being, and in fact the true purpose of life is to retrieve us from it' (WWR 2, 508/SW 3: 563). This line of thought shares with the Epicurean arguments an opposition to the attitude of the naïve, will-driven human individual, but opposes it in a different way. For if not being is an attainable purpose that is *better* than the conscious state in which things can be both good and bad for us, then not being is after all some kind of good. But that in turn means that something can be good for someone independently of their being conscious of it and of their existing. So, once again, the position seems to be that my death is my non-existence, and that it is a good, because existence is basically flawed and undesirable.

#### 4. Continued Existence

Despite all of the above, Schopenhauer ultimately wants to claim that my death is not my absolute non-existence. By his lights I should believe that something about me is indestructible. Not, as we said above, anything like a soul or immaterial substance, which Schopenhauer wholly rejects (see WWR 1, 519–21/SW 2: 581–3; WWR 2, 291/SW 3: 314)—but then *what* about me is supposed to be indestructible? First, Schopenhauer rather eloquently presents a kind of materialist version of continuity after death:

'What?' people will say, 'the permanence of mere dust, of crude matter, is to be regarded as a continuation of our being?'—But oh! Are you acquainted with this dust? Do you know what it is and what it can do? Get to know it

before you despise it. This matter that lies there now as dust and ashes will, when dissolved in water, sprout into a crystal, glisten as a metal, and then electric sparks will fly from it; by means of its galvanic tension it will express a force that dissolves the most solid ties and reduces earth to metal: in fact, it will form itself into plants and animals and from its mysterious womb develop the very life that you, in your narrow-mindedness, are so worried about losing. Is it really so meaningless to continue to exist as this kind of matter? I am serious when I say that even this permanence of matter bears witness to the indestructibility of our true being, even if only in images and metaphors, or rather only in silhouette. (WWR 2, 489/SW 3: 539–40)

Yet, powerful though this picture of material continuity may be, Schopenhauer nonetheless cannot accept it as anything more than an image, metaphor, or silhouette. The reason for this is that Schopenhauer's true solution to the problem of death is metaphysical, concerning not the continuity of anything empirical in space and time, but the timelessness of the thing in itself. The materialist continuity picture appeals to him because he holds that all of the material entities that exist at any time and place are manifestations of the same essence and that this essence is 'our true being'. According to transcendental idealism, which Schopenhauer accepts, there is a sharp contrast between representation (*Vorstellung*) and thing in itself. Space and time, and thus matter which occupies space and time, pertain only to the world as representation, not to the thing in itself. But we can aspire to a 'higher perspective' beyond empirical description that allows us to consider reality as unchanging and non-individuated. In ultimate reality there are no distinct things, and I am but a transient manifestation of the One that cannot be destroyed. Nothing that really exists can truly go out of existence, or indeed come into existence. From that perspective, Schopenhauer claims, we can assert both that the individual ceases to exist, and that the individual's true essence is not destroyed. Something timeless manifests itself for a while in the individual that I am, and it does not perish with the ending of this individual. It is in this sense that Schopenhauer can come to regard death as 'unreal'.

## 5. 'I, I, I, Want Existence'

From the discussion so far, it looks as though Schopenhauer wants to say both

- (1) At death I cease to exist

and

(2) At death I continue to exist.

Moreover, it looks as though both (1) and (2) are associated with some form of consolation. To see how Schopenhauer holds that (1) and (2) may both be true, we must recognize that he regards 'I' as ambiguous: 'the word "I" contains a huge equivocation.... Depending on how I understand this word, I can say: "death is my total end", but also: "my personal appearance is just as small a part of my true being as I am an infinitely small part of the world"' (WWR 2, 507/SW 3: 562). Someone taking the latter view could happily 'leave his individuality behind, smile at the tenacity of his attachment to it and say: "why do I care about the loss of this individuality since I carry in myself the possibility of countless individualities?"' (WWR 2, 507/SW 3: 562). In another passage we read 'Dying is the moment of that liberation from the one-sidedness of an individuality that does not constitute the innermost kernel of our essence, but should rather be viewed as a kind of straying from our essence... it is this moment that can be regarded, in the sense described, as a "restitution of wholeness"' (WWR 2, 524/SW 3: 582–3). If one can thus revise one's understanding of 'I', one may arrive at an attitude to death that contrasts with that of a natural, unenlightened individual.

In the second volume of his collected essays *Parerga and Paralipomena* Schopenhauer dramatizes this contrast, constructing a dialogue between Philalethes (lover of truth), and Thrasymachus, who appears on temporary loan, along with his truculent manner, from the *Republic*. Thrasymachus hears this message:

You, as an individual, end with your death. Only the individual is not your true and ultimate essence.... Your essence in itself... knows neither time, nor beginning, nor end, nor the bounds of a given individuality, but exists in everyone and everything. Therefore in the first sense you become nothing through your death; in the second you are and remain everything.

(PP 2, 252/SW 6: 297–8)

But Thrasymachus will not be consoled by the Schopenhauerian thought that, although the human individual he identifies himself as dies, the essence that he truly is (the will) exists timelessly. He replies, 'Look, be that as it may, it is my individuality and that is what I am... I, I, I, want existence. *That* is what I care

about, and not some existence for which I first have to figure out that it is mine' (PP 2, 253/SW 6: 299). Philalethes then replies:

That which cries out 'I, I, I want existence' is not you alone, but everything, absolutely everything that has even a trace of consciousness. Consequently this wish in you is exactly what is not individual, but instead common to everyone, without distinction. It does not stem from individuality, but from existence as such; it is essential to everything that is, indeed it is that whereby it exists, and accordingly it is satisfied by existence as such, to which alone it refers, but not exclusively through any particular, individual existence.

(PP 2, 253–4/SW 6: 299)

Thrasymachus represents the egoistic viewpoint that Schopenhauer considers natural to any cognitive being: everything centres on the well-being and existence of this individual that I am. His higher viewpoint involves the realization that one individual rather than another is of no great significance. Yes, the survival of the individual beyond death is an absurdity, and yes, the natural part of us that wills life recoils from annihilation. But, in Schopenhauer's view, if I can realize that my essence is identical with the timeless essence of the whole world, then I do not have to think of what I am as ceasing with the death of the individual. And since time is ideal rather than transcendently real, the distinction between individuals across time dissolves:

We sit together and talk and get excited, our eyes glow and our voices get louder; this is exactly how *others* sat a thousand years ago, it was the same and they are *the same ones*, and it will be just the same a thousand years from now. The contrivance that keeps us from realizing this is *time*.

(PP 2, 249/SW 6: 293–4)

Schopenhauer's doctrine that individuality is illusory gains its immediate support from Kant's transcendental idealism. But he also places himself in a network of different traditions, starting with the Vedas and Upaniṣads, but including Eleatics, Neo-Platonists, Scotus Erigena, Sufism, Giordano Bruno, Spinoza, and Schelling (BM, 251–2/SW 4: 268–9). He finds the rejection of the individuated self echoed in other places too:

In the *German Theology*...it says: 'In true love there is neither I nor Me, Mine, to Me, You, Yours, and the like.'...Buddha says: 'my students reject

the idea "I am this", or "this is mine".<sup>6</sup> In general, disregarding the forms introduced by external circumstances and getting to the bottom of the matter, Shakyamuni [the Buddha] and Meister Eckhart teach the same thing.  
(WWR 2, 628–9/SW 3: 705)

Probably the most significant of these influences comes from the Upaniṣads, which Schopenhauer read all his life—though admittedly in an idiosyncratic version<sup>6</sup>—and from which he quotes one of the four Great Sayings (*Mahāvākyas*), namely *tat tvam asi*, or 'that you are'.<sup>7</sup> This gives expression to the doctrine that *ātman* is *Brahman*, the self is the Absolute. This is not a view that there is no self, rather that your self is not distinct from the Absolute. Perhaps even more pertinent is another of the Great Sayings, *aham Brahmāsmi*, 'I am Brahman.' At least in barest outline, this is the kind of metaphysical view Schopenhauer requires, if there is to be some sense of 'I' that refers not to the individual but to something that endures all change in the existence of individuals.

## 6. Conclusion

In an attempt to sum up, the first obvious point to make is that Schopenhauer's view of death is far from simple, and comprises not so much a single verdict as an evolving sequence of meditations from shifting points of view. Schopenhauer's starting point is that, as an ordinary naïve human being who is essentially egoistic, my predominant tendency is to will the well-being of that one individual upon which my world is centred. Because any such being is driven by the will to life, death is something I will naturally fear. Schopenhauer is quite clear that personal immortality is not something to be hoped for: death is the annihilation of this individual and of the consciousness that this individual enjoys. A little Epicurean reflection suggests the thought that, precisely because it is accompanied by absence of consciousness, non-existence after death cannot be really bad for me. So it is irrational to fear being dead. However, that argument may not have much persuasive force, if the recoil from death does not have a rational basis in the first place. If I am someone like Schopenhauer's Thrasyarchus, I will not be consoled by such

<sup>6</sup> The *Upanek'hat*, translated by Anquetil-Duperron. For an exhaustive account of this work and Schopenhauer's use of it, see App 2014.

<sup>7</sup> See BM, 254/SW 4: 271; WWR 2, 616/SW 3: 690; PP 2, 199, 336/SW 6: 233, 396.



thoughts about non-existence: it is precisely my continued existence as a conscious individual that I want more than anything. But the next step is to ask: Is there good reason to want a prolongation of this existence? A distinctively Schopenhauerian reflection now produces the idea that existing as a living being, inevitably plagued as such beings are by desire and suffering, is a state that ought to be regretted. Once we open ourselves to that Schopenhauerian outlook, the non-existence of this living being takes on the aspect of a liberation and a relief. Thus, while still viewing matters from the point of view of individual existence, but now with a revised assessment of its value, we may come to welcome the prospect of death, even despite continuing to fear it.

However, if that were the final resting place for Schopenhauer's meditation, he would have no reason not to advocate suicide and would fall into the kind of contradiction Jacquette discussed. Instead, Schopenhauer adopts his 'higher perspective', according to which any good there might be in the individual's non-existence, or indeed in the individual's existence, is outweighed by the value of attaining the blissful state of will-lessness. To reach detachment from desires, at least those that centre upon the individual's well-being, or upon the 'I, Me, Mine' that constitute a fall into error and illusion for the Christian mystics and their counterparts in Indian thought, is the superior way to attain release, redemption, salvation from life. It is because this altered consciousness of self is the 'highest good' for Schopenhauer that he can treat the individual's self-destruction while in the snares of egoistic delusion as an error. Finally, if the individual we so fondly identify with is ultimately to be recognized as an illusion, we may be open to the vision, albeit uncommon in modern Western philosophy, though widespread in the history of thought more generally, that we are not distinct from the 'One and All', which is not destroyed when any one individual dies. Thus the consolation Schopenhauer offers at the end of his reflections is truly accessible only to someone who is open to such a broadly religious or mystical view of the relation of the self to the world.

# Worse than the Best Possible Pessimism?

## Olga Plümacher's Critique of Schopenhauer

### 1. Introduction

Olga Plümacher, née Hünerwadel, was born in Russia in 1839 to Swiss and Prussian parents, and died in 1895 in Beersheba Springs, Tennessee. Plümacher was without formal philosophical education, but was intellectually adventurous and achieved a significant philosophical presence as a self-taught thinker. She influenced the writer Frank Wedekind, as his so called 'philosophical aunt', and published (under the gender-neutral 'O. Plümacher') three books: *Der Kampf um's Unbewusste* (1881), *Zwei Individualisten der Schopenhauer'schen Schule* (1881), and *Der Pessimismus in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (1884, reprinted 1888<sup>1</sup>). She also published articles, including one in English entitled 'Pessimism' in the fourth edition of the journal *Mind*.<sup>2</sup>

Here I discuss Plümacher's *Der Pessimismus in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (*Pessimism in Past and Present*), in which she sets herself a threefold task. First, she surveys the wider strands that have fed into pessimism, including Indian philosophy, ancient Greek philosophy, Judaism, Christianity, scientific scepticism, and the outlook of *Weltschmerz*, or world-weariness<sup>3</sup> found especially in poetry and popular culture. Secondly, she gives an analytical account of philosophical pessimism, which, as she says in her Introduction, was 'first presented as an indispensable organic part of a complete philosophical system by *Arthur Schopenhauer*, and which has *Eduard von Hartmann* as its most prominent present advocate'.<sup>4</sup> She also includes Julius Bahnsen and Phillip Mainländer as philosophical pessimists, and

<sup>1</sup> I cite the 1888 edition throughout.

<sup>2</sup> For a biography, see Kieser 1990. See Beiser 2016: 168–9, 182–5; Beiser 2014: 218–19; Dahlkvist 2007: 37, 222; Fazio 2009: 27–9.

<sup>3</sup> I retain 'Weltschmerz' throughout. 'World-weariness' would more accurately translate *Weltmüdigkeit*, a term Plümacher also uses, in association with Christianity (Plümacher 1888: 48).

<sup>4</sup> Plümacher 1888: 1. Translations from Plümacher's book are my own.

mentions a few other contemporaries.<sup>5</sup> But philosophical pessimism for her culminates in the work of Hartmann, and it is from this standpoint that she criticizes Schopenhauer.<sup>6</sup> Although some passages in her book are derivative from Hartmann, she presents her critique with a succinctness Hartmann was unable to achieve and paints a more vivid picture. Thirdly, Plümacher catalogues the antagonistic reaction to pessimism in the learned world of her day, and the defence taken up by Hartmann and his partisans. This part of the book is a valuable record of an all but forgotten episode in intellectual history, and in Frederick Beiser's words mounts a 'solid and lucid' response to pessimism's opponents.<sup>7</sup> Beiser says little concerning Plümacher's attitude to Schopenhauer, concentrating instead on her account of the contemporary *Pessimismusstreit*, of which he rates her the 'great historian'.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, I shall concentrate on her criticisms of Schopenhauer, not for being a pessimist; rather, for not achieving as good a pessimism as he might have done. One further aspect of note is the influence that the *Pessimismus* book had on Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche owned a copy of the 1884 edition, which is 'annotated throughout' by him,<sup>9</sup> and we shall note some interesting cases where passages in his works parallel Plümacher.

What I intend to show is as follows: (1) that Plümacher displays originality and insight in her analysis of Schopenhauer, in particular in distinguishing the claims of *philosophical pessimism* from the attitude of *Weltschmerz*; (2) that Plümacher makes highly pertinent criticisms of Schopenhauer's system of thought that have independently become familiar since her time; (3) that Nietzsche used some of her ideas, or at the very least her phraseology, without acknowledgement at prominent points in his later writings; (4) that Plümacher wishes to defend a version of philosophical pessimism that is free of *Weltschmerz* and of the inconsistencies of Schopenhauer, but that in doing so she is largely derivative from Hartmann's account of pessimism, and in the end unpersuasive because of the implausibility of Hartmann's account.

## 2. Schopenhauer and *Weltschmerz*

Plümacher's account of Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism places it in contrast with the condition known as *Weltschmerz*. The latter is a self-centred

<sup>5</sup> She lists Eugen Dühring, Ferdinand Laban, Raphael Koeber, Moriz Venetianer, and A. Taubert as 'pessimists without their own independent system' (Plümacher 1888: 175–7).

<sup>6</sup> For succinct accounts of Hartmann's philosophy see Beiser 2016: 122–61; Gardner 2010; Wolf 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Beiser 2016: 182. <sup>8</sup> Beiser 2014: 160.

<sup>9</sup> Brobjer 2008: 99. For a list of the annotations, see Campioni et al. 2003: 467–8.

attitude of lament about the world and one's uneasy place within it, whose most distinguished expressions are literary and poetic. She is insistent that *Weltschmerz* is different from philosophical pessimism, and is not really philosophy at all,<sup>10</sup> because, as she says in her article in *Mind*, philosophical pessimism is 'uninfluenced by subjective feelings, rests exclusively on objective observation, and counts individual sensation as an object among other objects'.<sup>11</sup> Plümacher is disparaging of *Weltschmerz*: it is 'lyrical-poetic and not philosophical' because it 'posits one's own I as centre of the world and laments it as such, or feels its torment as the world's torment'. For philosophy, by contrast, 'one's own I is just one object among other objects; philosophy leads out from the I, while lyrical poetry concentrates everything into the subject of sensation as the poetic mirror of the world' (1888: 5). She classes *Weltschmerz* as a 'sickness of youth' (107), an immature stage of self-preoccupation that is ideally to be outgrown. It is also a historically bounded condition:

The period of *Weltschmerz* begins in the last decade of the previous century and lasts until the present, while the typical literary monuments produced by *Weltschmerz* fall in the 20s to the 50s of our century. In its various stages, *Weltschmerz* is a reaction against the rationalist Enlightenment philosophy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, against Kant's ethical rigorism, and Fichte's abstract idealism. It is the consciousness that neither enlightenment in matters of religion, nor the advances of science, nor their application to ordinary life, nor moderate advances towards a more favourable political order, can make us happy . . . . *Weltschmerz* is also the consciousness that, however much the world is *altered* inwardly and outwardly, it still remains the same 'earthly vale of sorrow' as in the [Christian] dogma that has been discarded as irrational, only it is now somewhat more darkly overshadowed because the rainbow of hope for a beyond no longer arches above it. Finally, *Weltschmerz* is the consciousness that virtue and happiness . . . are not proportionate to one another. (106)

In her descriptions of *Weltschmerz* as a distinctively modern condition, Plümacher at times sounds (for today's reader) reminiscent of Nietzsche. See, for example, *On the Genealogy of Morality* II: 6–7 (KSA 5: 300–5),

<sup>10</sup> Hence, for all Beiser's advocacy of Plümacher, she might not have approved of the linking of philosophical pessimism and *Weltschmerz* in his recent title.

<sup>11</sup> Plümacher 1888: 88.

where Nietzsche contrasts a past relish for cruelty with modern softness. But we should rather say that Nietzsche is reminiscent of Plümacher, who writes:

The bearer of *Weltschmerz* is the offspring of generations whose struggle for existence was conducted predominantly with weapons of the intellect; he is alienated in the highest degree from nature *in concreto*, although *in abstracto* he often insists with pathos that he belongs to it, and feels this alienation painfully, despite the fact that he would no longer be able to tolerate the opposite situation. . . . A modern human being who possesses the intellectual and mental qualities requisite for *Weltschmerz* finds the mere representation of certain things and events sufficient to disturb his comfort. Things and events that did not diminish the feeling of well-being in his ancient and medieval ancestors even when they were there in reality before their very eyes, but which, quite the contrary, were regarded as enhancements of pleasure in contrast with one's own condition. Thus, for example, it would be a spice of heavenly blissfulness to look through a peep-hole from time to time and see the damned roasting in hell; in many castles the trap-door into the dungeon was in or immediately adjacent to the ballroom; the auto-da-fé was a component of Spanish royal weddings. (101–2)

Page 102 of Plümacher's first edition is one of the pages Nietzsche marked.<sup>12</sup> In the *Genealogy*, he writes:

It is repugnant to the delicacy . . . of tame domestic animals (which is to say modern humans, which is to say us) to imagine in all its force the degree to which *cruelty* constitutes the great festival joy of earlier humanity. . . . [I]t has not been long since one could not imagine royal marriages and folk festivals without executions, torturings, or perhaps an *auto-da-fé*, likewise no noble household without beings on whom one could vent one's malice and cruel teasing without a second thought. (*Genealogy* II: 6/KSA 5: 301)<sup>13</sup>

The detailed similarity here is too strong to be coincidental, though Nietzsche follows his usual practice and gives no acknowledgement.

For Plümacher the person of *Weltschmerz* is a product of the modern European world, over-sensitive, over-compassionate—Plümacher diagnoses

<sup>12</sup> See Campioni et al. 2003: 468.

<sup>13</sup> Plümacher's 'heavenly blissfulness of seeing the damned roasting in hell' also finds an echo at GM I: 15/KSA 5: 284–5, where Nietzsche cites that attitude in Aquinas and Tertullian.

in the *Weltschmerzler*, and in Schopenhauer, 'a soft heart for the sufferings of the animal world and of less intellectually endowed humans from distant places and times' (129)—and self-obsessed: 'annoyance with the world is combined with contented immersion in one's own interior, where the man of *Weltschmerz*, aided by his recognition of the deficiencies of the world and of his time, catches sight of something higher' (103). The world's sufferings are 'indispensable for the sake of the pleasure gained from a self-concerned rummaging in one's own "torn heart"' (104). The *Weltschmerzler* is internally conflicted: he 'feels his reflection on the world's misery, which he feels as his own suffering, and his compassion for his own soul with its wealth of feeling and cognition, as a kind of pleasure', yet becomes conscious that the displeasure the world inflicts on him always threatens to outweigh this pleasure. 'And yet pleasure is there, if frequently not acknowledged; and when it itself becomes the object of reflection in turn, there arises *self-irony*' (103–4). There is a kind of gratification in being miserable about the world, and a self-aestheticization that finds this very inner tension fascinating.

*Weltschmerz* does not constitute a philosophical position, and does not arise out of one. Rather, it is the other way round. In Schopenhauer's case *Weltschmerz* is the chief *motive* for engaging in philosophy: he produces a metaphysics out of the conviction that life is by nature full of suffering, and that there is a discrepancy between what human beings will and what generally happens to them (124). But in producing that metaphysics he transcends *Weltschmerz*, shifting from self-centred and self-gratifying complaint about the world to an account of the metaphysical *ground* of the human condition. He 'embraces all the data of *Weltschmerz*, but for him the world's misery is no longer an unsolved puzzle, as it was for the proponent of *Weltschmerz*' (127). His metaphysics of the will provides a solution to the puzzle, and this, for Plümacher, makes him a *philosophical* pessimist—and indeed the first of his kind.

Nonetheless, Schopenhauer is still detrimentally influenced by *Weltschmerz*, according to Plümacher. The above-mentioned 'soft heart' for all suffering creatures is one example. She gives another in a particularly vivid passage:

Schopenhauer's sensibility is entirely that of the man of *Weltschmerz*. He has a titanic feeling of self [*ein titanisches Selbstgefühl*], ... It also leads him to a lofty glorification of the genius in contrast with 'nature's mass products'.

This strong genial feeling of the I is just a specific application of a strong feeling of individuality. Hence also the lament—not pessimistic, but truly characteristic of *Weltschmerz*—over earthly transitoriness and the lively emphasis on death as the first and highest of all ills. (129)

According to Schopenhauer's metaphysics individuality is supposed to be 'merely phenomenal', while in reality there is ultimately the non-individuated thing in itself. Schopenhauer states: 'at bottom every individuality is only a special error, a misstep, something that would be better off not being, and in fact the true purpose of life is to retrieve us from it' (WWR 2: 508/SW 3: 563). Yet the marvellous phrase '*titanisches Selbstgefühl*' captures an undeniable aspect of Schopenhauer's authorial persona that stands in tension with his metaphysics and tends to valorize his own individuality. He explains at length the vast distance between individuals of great intellect and run-of-the-mill humanity, and becomes embarrassingly self-regarding when arguing that being neglected in one's own day is a proof of greatness.

However, as regards Schopenhauer's philosophical position, this admitted tension is possibly less stark than Plümacher implies. First, Schopenhauer's view that we need to be *retrieved from* our identification with individuality rests on its being the natural default position for any human being. Only a radical cognitive transformation, a transition into a state of 'total will-lessness' will stop anyone from identifying the self as simply the individual human being: for each of us naturally

sits calmly in a world full of sorrow, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis*.... [H]is vanishing little person, his unextended present, his momentary comfort, these alone have reality for him: and he does everything he can to maintain these as long as a more adequate cognition does not open his eyes. (WWR 1: 379/SW 2: 416)

Schopenhauer's reply to Plümacher could be that in this respect he is just like everyone else. Everyone would be better off if they *could* view the world in the way his metaphysics dictates, but the default position of identification with the individual is extremely difficult for anyone, himself included, to overcome. Still, Plümacher's rather pertinent point is that Schopenhauer's works give little evidence of his regarding the human individual Arthur Schopenhauer as a 'vanishing little person', or of ever wanting to.

Secondly, Schopenhauer does not depict the individual's death as 'the first and highest of all ills'. Rather, he calls death 'the great opportunity not to be I any longer' (WWR 2, 524/SW 3: 582), and says one should tell a dying person, 'you are ceasing to be something that it would have been better for you never to have become' (WWR 2, 517/SW 3: 574). He emphasizes that our own death is something we naturally fear as the greatest loss, but thinks we do so without good reason, and only because the non-rational will to life (our

essence) disposes us to cling to life as though it were a good. In *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Volume 2 Schopenhauer has a character exclaim 'I, I, I want existence! *That* is what I care about' (PP2: 253/SW 6: 299). That is the natural view, but the reply is as follows:

That which cries out 'I, I, I want existence', is not you alone, but everything, absolutely everything that has even a trace of consciousness. Consequently this wish in you is exactly what is *not* individual . . . . It does not stem from individuality, but from existence as such; it is essential to everything *that* is, indeed, it is that *whereby* it exists. (PP 2: 253–4/SW 6: 299)

The view that clings to individuality 'would seem childish and utterly ridiculous . . . if you could know your own essence totally and down to its foundation, namely as the universal will to life that is you' (PP2: 254/SW 6: 300). Therefore it is hard to conclude that Schopenhauer simply laments death as a great ill. It is true that he documents at length the fact that death is commonly lamented and feared as the greatest evil. But he deploys his monism and his doctrine of the phenomenal nature of individuation to show why from a 'higher standpoint' the common lament is unfounded. However, Plümacher identifies the *Weltschmerz* trait in the apparent gratification with which Schopenhauer tends to remind the reader of the 'horrifying certainty of death' (e.g., WWR 2, 480/SW 3: 529).

Plümacher's observations hit home even more clearly with respect to Schopenhauer's discussion of the artistic genius. Here he clearly trespasses onto the territory of Plümacher's 'lyrical-poetic' *Weltschmerz* when he writes of the 'suffering and essential martyrdom of genius', citing the eponymous poet of Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*, and the biography of Byron, among others (WWR 1, 214/SW 2: 225). This theme is somewhat at odds with his insistence that the genius's constitutive state of mind is one of pure contemplation, which 'calls for a complete forgetting of one's own person and its relationships', and stands 'opposed to a subjective orientation that is directed to one's own person, i.e. the will' (WWR 1, 208–9/SW 2: 218). What is essential is the genius's capacity to *escape* his<sup>14</sup> individuality through enhanced objectivity of cognition. Although the Schopenhauerian genius is by definition a unique individual with abilities superior to those of the majority, the cognitive capacities that constitute genius are seemingly the antithesis of *Weltschmerz*'s

<sup>14</sup> Schopenhauer's notorious view is that 'Females can have significant talent but not genius' (WWR 2, 409/SW 3: 449).



individualism and despairing emotionality. Nonetheless Schopenhauer can write that the genius finds a consolation in art that ‘compensates him for his suffering (which is increased in proportion to his clarity of consciousness) and also for his desolate solitude among a race so different from him’ (WWR 1, 295/SW 2: 315). So it is precisely because of his ability to see the world impersonally that the genius suffers more. Plümacher is acute in locating this self-centred *Weltschmerz* aspect in Schopenhauer’s writings.

### 3. Philosophical Pessimism

We saw that Schopenhauer escapes from simple *Weltschmerz* and becomes a proponent of philosophical pessimism. In Plümacher’s highly economical characterization, philosophical pessimism consists of just two propositions:

- (i) the sum of displeasure [*Unlust*] outweighs the sum of pleasure [*Lust*]
- (ii) consequently the non-being [*Nichtsein*] of the world would be better than its being [*Sein*] (Plümacher 1888: 1).

Plümacher states that Schopenhauer was the first to present this dual doctrine as ‘an indispensable organic part of a complete philosophical system’ (1). For these propositions, consider the following extracts from Chapter 46 of *The World as Will and Representation*, volume 2:

[J]ust stop and compare the sum of all possible joys that a human being can have in his life with the sum of all possible sufferings that can afflict him in his life. I think that the balance will not be hard to determine.

(WWR 2, 591/SW 3: 661)

[W]e should be sorry rather than glad about the existence of the world; ... its non-existence would be preferable to its existence; ... it is something that fundamentally should not be, etc. (WWR 2, 591–2: 661)

Thus it is true that Schopenhauer states both propositions (i) and (ii). He also states that the *mere existence* of suffering would be enough to justify the verdict that non-existence would be preferable, since only an entirely perfect world could be justified as an end in itself (*Endzweck*). So for him the claim that pleasure predominates over pain is not exactly definitive of philosophical pessimism, as Plümacher would have it. Nevertheless, the ‘mere existence of

suffering' argument is hard to defend, and Plümacher can claim to be developing a more rigorous but still Schopenhauerian core to pessimism.

While Plümacher defends the simple position expressed by propositions (i) and (ii), (though, as we shall see, for reasons other than Schopenhauer's), she is highly critical of wider elements of Schopenhauer's system. She makes much of what she calls Schopenhauer's *Weltverachtung*, his contempt for the world (129–33). She calls contempt for the world the 'official *Weltanschauung*' of medieval Christianity (70), focusing on the twelfth-century text *De contemptu mundi*, whose author later became Pope Innocent III. Plümacher provides a 'free translation' of Part One of this treatise, including its tirade against the squalor of human existence with its 'disgusting nutrition of the child in the mother's body, ... disgusting sickness and deficiency of the body, ... you excrete urine, spit and excrement', and so on (66–7). Again, Nietzsche helps himself to wording from Plümacher's translation in his citation of Innocent III at *Genealogy* II: 7.<sup>15</sup> Like Nietzsche, Plümacher sees Schopenhauer as allying himself too closely to the world-denying aspect of Christianity.

For Plümacher, 'religious pessimism... sees the root and cause of the world's suffering in the creaturely choice of sin' (6), and in line with this, Schopenhauer

commits himself to the ethical and religious pessimism of *contemptus mundi*. He not only views suffering everywhere, he also has night vision [*Nachtauge*] for seeing *guilt* everywhere. And he even sees it where it is not, in that he applies the ethical concept 'guilt', which has only immanent legitimacy, to existence and its transcendent causality....

He directly identifies the world's not being motivated intellectually with its being unjustified. The world's existence which, as unhappy experience teaches, would be better not being, becomes for him something that should not be, meaning something that ought not to be. (1888: 129)

Plümacher is acute on Schopenhauer's relation to Christianity. She recognizes that his commitment to atheism is fundamental, and she explains why there *cannot* be a god in Schopenhauer's world:

<sup>15</sup> Compare the German texts. Plümacher 1888: 66–7: 'wir sind aus unreinem Samen hervorgegangen... Ekelhaft ist die Ernährung des Kindes in Mutterleibe... du aber scheidest Urin, Speichel und Koth aus;... du aber gibst abscheulichen Gestank non dir!' and Nietzsche, GM II: 7/KSA 5: 303: 'unreine Erzeugung, ekelhafte Ernährung im Mutterleibe, Schlechtigkeit des Stoffs, aus dem der Mensch sich entwickelt, scheusslicher Gestank, Absonderung von Speichel, Urin und Koth'. (Nietzsche read the 1884 first edition of Plümacher.)

according to this theory everything spiritual, everything intellectual, along with the entire realm of form and determination, belongs only to the 'world as representation', i.e. to subjective appearance. The 'how' of the world is thus, in its relation to the absolute, purely accidental in kind, and for us, as the subject contemplating the world, the only thing that is *not so much cognized*, as *immediately given in our self-experience*, is the *will*, which as a blind principle cannot be God. (125)

But she rightly emphasizes Schopenhauer's deliberate continuity with strands of Christianity that are pessimistic. In Schopenhauer's view,

Christianity is the doctrine of the profound guilt of the human race through its very existence, and the heart's longing for a redemption that can only be achieved by the most difficult sacrifice and denial of one's own self, and so by a complete overturning of human nature. (WWR 2, 641/SW 3: 718–19)

So it is no surprise that, as Plümacher puts it, 'Schopenhauer condemns the world because it is without pleasure, and once he has turned this condemned existence into one that is guiltily attained, the ills of the world now appear to him as a *consequence of guilt*' (1888: 130).<sup>16</sup> There is another link to Nietzsche here, when in Book Five of *The Gay Science* (1887) he assesses Schopenhauer as an 'uncompromising atheist' who can nonetheless be charged with 'staying stuck [*Steckenbleiben*] in...Christian-ascetic moral perspectives'.<sup>17</sup> Again Nietzsche has taken his words from Plümacher, without acknowledgement: she had already written of Schopenhauer's '*Steckenbleiben* in the scholastic concepts of freedom, guilt and sin' (1888: 248).

Plümacher regards *contemptus mundi* and guilt about our existence as extraneous to philosophical pessimism. But we might turn the argument round, and suggest that her characterization of philosophical pessimism is perhaps too narrow to capture what is distinctive in *Schopenhauer's* philosophical pessimism. Suffering for him is a key to what is most fundamentally wrong with our existence, namely that we *will*, and specifically that we will to satisfy the ends of the individual. We are trapped in an illusion that these are valuable ends, and in the mistake of lamenting their non-attainment, all of which rests on the cognitive error of believing in the reality of the individual.

<sup>16</sup> Plümacher here cites WWR 2, 595–6/SW 3: 666: 'If we want to measure the degree of guilt with which our existence itself is burdened, just look at the suffering linked to it. Every great pain, whether physical or mental, tells us what we deserve, because it could not befall us unless we deserved it.'

<sup>17</sup> GS, 357/KSA 3:601.

Until we are released from that belief, suffering is and should be our lot. It is these ideas that Schopenhauer seeks to find buried within Christianity's figurative story of fall and redemption, and its depiction of life as a vale of tears.<sup>18</sup> Plümacher is right that Schopenhauer embraces certain core values of Christianity. For her, as for Nietzsche, this is a criticism, because she wishes to see a philosophical position that is not beholden to Christianity, which she calls a 'dogma that has been discarded as irrational' (106). So her criticism is in effect that, while the aforementioned Christian attitudes are central to Schopenhauer's thought, they are extraneous to philosophical pessimism in her own more rigorous characterization.

Plümacher identifies Schopenhauer's conception of individuation as 'most disastrous for his system' (131),<sup>19</sup> and aims some well-taken criticisms at it. First, how has guilt come about? 'If we are told that life is like a guilt [or debt, *Schuld*] we have incurred, that the sufferings of life are the interest we have to pay on it, and it will only be paid off by death, then the question arises: by *whom* and *when* was this guilt incurred?' (130). If the willing and suffering individual is merely a subjective appearance, then the real locus of guilt and suffering can only be the one essence of the world, the will. So the individual is fundamentally unreal and innocent, yet at the same time is somehow deserving of the punishment life metes out: 'each individual is at the same time guilty and innocent, and just as deserving of anger as of compassion' (130). It makes no sense anyway, Plümacher argues, to apply the concept *guilt* to anything other than a moral agent. So the monistic world-will cannot easily be guilty or responsible in an ethical sense. But we then end in incoherence, with nothing and nobody incurring the supposed guilt that attaches to our existence.

Schopenhauer notoriously has a problem with responsibility that runs into difficulties over individuation: our actions are determined by our character and occurrent motives, yet we have a firm conviction of being 'the doers of our deeds'.<sup>20</sup> The proposed solution is that we are free not in our actions, but in our being (*esse*), which Schopenhauer, following Kant, conceives as our intelligible character. Plümacher (131) gives this idea short shrift: the idea is 'untenable in and of itself', but also impossible to integrate into Schopenhauer's own system. For it presupposes individuation outside the empirical realm—something that is distinctively *my* character, yet not subject

<sup>18</sup> See especially WWR 2, 600, 643–4/SW 3: 671–2, 722.

<sup>19</sup> She also reminds us (1888: 246) of Schopenhauer's confession that he does not explore 'how deeply the roots of individuation go' into reality (PP2, 206/SW 6: 242. See also WWR 2, 658/SW 3: 737–8).

<sup>20</sup> FW, 105/SW 4: 93.

to space, time or causality. The same problem also affects Schopenhauer's ethics. For Schopenhauer the sole criterion of an action's moral worth is its stemming from compassion, which he glosses as 'willing someone else's well-being'.<sup>21</sup> But his insistence on the merely phenomenal nature of the individual, citing the Upaniṣads' *tat tvam asi*, 'thou art that', seems to destroy the point of compassion, says Plümacher, because 'only if the "thou" and "the others" are real existences and not merely "my representation" does the criterion of morality have any sense' (246).

Schopenhauer's doctrine of salvation through negation of the will is also muddled by problems concerning individuation, according to Plümacher, so that 'it remains totally incomprehensible how redemption from the unhappiness of willing, and thereby from existence, is supposed to take place':

[I]f the individual is supposed to be *only* a subjective appearance, only illusion and deception of *māyā*, then its departure from the world would also be meaningless and itself only illusion. And indeed, that which suffers and longs for redemption is not merely the individual as the object of an onlooking subject, not the illusory image framed in the 'world as representation', rather that which wills and suffers is the one will that is concealed behind the illusion of multiple individuals. So if the core of an individual, once it has willed and suffered but also attained *cognition*, then negates itself and releases itself from existence, the one will would be what had been removed. Therefore if a *genuine, real* negation of the will were to take place . . . , the one world-will must cease, and so it would be not merely the individual that ceased to exist through the quietive of pessimistic cognition, but the world. (132)

Plümacher's concluding comment here is rather sarcastic: if, as Schopenhauer claims, some ascetics have attained total negation of the will, then the world should have come to an end, which it has not. The only alternatives are that what ascetics have achieved is not total negation of the will, or that Schopenhauer's theory of the individual's relation to the world is in error (132). These criticisms of Schopenhauer's confusions over individuation are accurate and damaging. For Plümacher they show that Schopenhauer to some extent spoiled what could otherwise be a successful pessimistic theory.

<sup>21</sup> See BM, 201, 254–5/SW 4: 210, 272.

#### 4. Plümacher's Defence of Pessimism

Recall that for Plümacher philosophical pessimism consists simply in the two propositions:

- (i) the sum of displeasure outweighs the sum of pleasure
- (ii) consequently the non-being of the world would be better than its being  
(Plümacher 1888: 1).

In light of the *comparative* nature of judgement (ii), the term 'pessimism' does not accurately characterize the position at stake, according to Plümacher. The claim is not that the world, or existence, is *pessimum*, the worst thing. She calls 'pessimism' an 'arbitrary derivative term' invented to be the counterpart to 'optimism' (2).<sup>22</sup> Leibniz's optimism genuinely makes a superlative rather than comparative claim about the world's being the best possible, but the *denial* of (ii) need not be the claim that existence is the *best* state of affairs; the position that opposes (ii) should strictly be called 'meliorism', the claim that 'the world's existence is an existence to be affirmed, that *being is to be preferred to non-being*' (2). Plümacher retains 'pessimism' as a standard term and offers no replacement (it would presumably have to be *peiorism*), but insists that all Schopenhauer can really mean is a comparative judgement.<sup>23</sup>

Plümacher, like Schopenhauer, holds that (i) is true: the sum of displeasure outweighs the sum of pleasure. But, following Hartmann, she is critical of Schopenhauer's way of establishing (i). Schopenhauer argues that pleasure is negative, as for example in this often-cited passage:

We feel pain, but not painlessness; we feel worry, but not freedom from worry; we feel fear but not security. We feel a desire as we feel hunger and thirst; but as soon as it is fulfilled, it is like a bite of food we have enjoyed, which stops existing for our feeling the moment it is swallowed. We feel the painful loss of pleasures and joys as soon as they are gone: but pains, even if they are present for a long time before departing, are not immediately missed; if we think of them at all it is intentionally, by means of reflection. For only pain and lack can be felt positively and therefore register their presence: well-being on the other hand is merely negative.

(WWR 2: 590/SW 3: 659–60)

<sup>22</sup> See Hartmann 1931, III: 12.

<sup>23</sup> Schopenhauer tries to take 'pessimism' in a strict superlative sense in one passage where he argues that this is the worst possible world (WWR 2, 598–9/SW 3: 669–71).

This runs together a number of distinct points. First, Schopenhauer equates pleasure with the satisfaction of a will or desire, and equates desire with a painfully felt lack. Hence he can claim that pleasure is never 'pure', but always conditional upon its relation to some foregoing pain. Second, he makes a point about the salience or importance of pleasures in our conscious attention, claiming that we attend to them less than we do to pains. Finally, he claims that pleasure is negative in the sense that we *do not feel* it: when a desire is satisfied, we merely experience its absence and return to a 'neutral' state without hedonic content. This latter claim is questionable, but it is distinct from the previous two claims and not supported by them. Even if all pleasure were conditional on the cessation of a felt lack, and if pleasure were never salient in our attention, it could not be concluded that pleasure is never positively felt.

Hence Plümacher seems right to dismiss this final claim as support for pessimism's proposition (i):

as a counterpart to Leibniz, who presents displeasure as mere negation of pleasure, [Schopenhauer] attempts just as abortively to explain displeasure as the *only positive* and pleasure as its negation. Everyone's experience contradicts this theory just as much as it contradicts its optimistic antipode. (3)

The positive feeling of pleasure is empirically attested in obvious fashion. Plümacher concludes in line with Hartmann that

if we wish to use the designation 'negative' and 'positive' to apply to mental states of pleasure and displeasure, this can be done only...such that both possess *reality* to the *same degree*, and the terminology is used only to fix their position in relation to the 'zero point of sensation' (absence of pain [*Schmerz*] and absence of pleasure). (3)

The question then arises: how is (i) to be supported? If pleasure and pain both 'possess reality' in the sense of being equally felt, and if there are neutral states in which neither is felt, on what grounds can we claim that there is more pain than pleasure? Plümacher gives Hartmann's argument here.<sup>24</sup> Pleasure and

<sup>24</sup> She gives a paraphrase of Hartmann 1931, II: 13–14.

displeasure both affect the nervous system, and as they endure they cause exhaustion or fatigue (*Ermüdung*) to the organism;

from this there arises a need (i.e. an unconscious or conscious will) to make the feeling cease or diminish, a need which grows with the degree and duration of the feeling. In the case of displeasure this need adds to the straightforward aversion towards undergoing the displeasure, but in the case of pleasure it subtracts from the will that affirms the pleasure, and not only decreases the pleasure, but can also make the feeling change into displeasure. (138)

This second-order displeasure through fatigue attaches both to first-order pleasure and to first-order displeasure. As a consequence, while prolonged first-order displeasure just gets worse, prolonged first-order pleasure becomes tedious, or even ceases to be pleasure at all. Thus even if we hypothesized an existence comprising first-order pleasure and displeasure of equal duration and intensity, displeasure would still predominate.

Later comes a slightly puzzling passage:

Now since consideration of the various factors in life shows that there is more pain than pleasure in the world, the result is that the greater part of pleasure in the world has this kind of indirect origin, and this makes Schopenhauer's theory of the negativity of pleasure excusable. (138)

By 'the various factors of life' is meant such things as health, youth, freedom, work, hunger, love, compassion, friendship, and so on, which Hartmann had examined at length, discovering that they all contain either a hedonic zero, or more pain than pleasure.<sup>25</sup> But there are two rather strange features of the above passage. Following Hartmann closely,<sup>26</sup> Plümacher appears simply to assert the predominance of pain over pleasure here, although this had seemed to be a conclusion to be argued towards. Secondly, it seems that an empirical survey of life is required to establish (i), whereas Hartmann elsewhere asserts that the predominance of pain over pleasure or vice versa must 'follow *with necessity* from the nature of the conditions present in the world', if any systematic pessimism or optimism is to be viable.<sup>27</sup> The predominance of displeasure thus seems to be both true a priori and confirmable through

<sup>25</sup> See Hartmann 1931, II: 23–79.

<sup>26</sup> Hartmann 1931, II: 14.

<sup>27</sup> Hartmann 1872: 73 (my translation and emphasis).



empirical evidence—which in fact mirrors Schopenhauer's view. Schopenhauer sees us 'convincing ourselves *a priori* that human life is dispositionally incapable of true happiness' but then says 'we could arouse a much more vivid conviction in ourselves if we wanted to take a more *a posteriori* approach and deal with particular cases' (WWR 1, 349/SW 2: 381). The upshot of this rather laboured discussion is that Schopenhauer was right for the wrong reason. Pain predominates, but neither because pleasure is always relative to a prior displeasure, nor because pleasure is not positively felt, both of which claims are false.

Proposition (i) is not obviously sufficient by itself to justify (ii). We require at least a suppressed premise to the effect that the value of existence is a function solely of the amount of pleasure versus pain that it contains. Plümacher appears to assert this, stating that '[o]nly the eudaemonological criterion is decisive for the value or disvalue of the world's existence, it is something final which we cannot surpass, and all other criteria must be in accord with it' (137). But what would such 'other criteria' be, and why could they not 'surpass' the criterion of the amount of pleasure? Plümacher makes this assertion in the context of explaining Hartmann's position, which she says is a pessimism that also encompasses 'evolutionary, aesthetic and ethical optimism' (137), meaning that 'certain natural and social relations can develop into *more valuable* ones', quite in contrast to Schopenhauer, 'whose world view is thoroughly ahistorical and explains all development as illusion' (4). On the view Plümacher prefers, things in the world can get better, and indeed 'the world is as good as it can be' (it turns out after all to be the best possible world), while at the same time, without contradiction, it remains 'worse than [there being] no world'.<sup>28</sup>

What, then, gives value to these 'more valuable' circumstances that may arise in the course of time? If the value they contribute were to be accounted for in hedonic terms, then the claim would have to be that the pleasure in existence can by all means increase, but can never exceed the pain. But that sounds less like a combination of pessimism and optimism, and more like simply a form of pessimism. A more convincing (non-eudaemonological) optimism arises if we conceive the added value of the ethical, aesthetic, and evolutionary developments in terms *other than* their causing happiness or diminishing pain. But then it threatens to become unclear why the relative lack of pleasure should *decide* the value of existence as opposed to non-existence. If there are other goods that make it an improving world, then why not disregard

<sup>28</sup> Plümacher 1888: 136.

the relative amounts of pleasure and displeasure as a side issue, and simply *affirm* existence, despite its pains, in light of its other values?

### 5. Hartmann's Combination of Pessimism and Optimism

Hartmann's combination of pessimism with optimism, which Plümacher inherits and seeks to defend, is a defining characteristic of the supposedly better pessimism that Plümacher advocates, but also one of its stranger features. Perhaps stranger still is the claim that this combination *enhances* pessimism: one might think that adding optimism into the mix will either result in an outright muddled position or rob the pessimism of its title altogether. However, the superiority of the combined position is supposed to lie in its ridding pessimism of the charge of *quietism* that attends Schopenhauer's version, thus providing a motivation for positive action that is engaged in changing the world.<sup>29</sup> Seeing change for the better as possible, one can be practically motivated towards social, ethical, and aesthetic action, and away from passive resignation, but without having to rescind one's commitment to theoretical pessimism.

Even a summary of Hartmann's voluminous and perplexing philosophy is beyond the scope of the present paper. But a glimpse at his position may clarify to some extent the combination of optimism and pessimism that Plümacher wishes to defend. Plümacher explains: 'because of the *logicality* of the pure formal principle, certain natural and social relations can develop into *more valuable* ones' (4). It is an avowedly post-Hegelian idea: reality in itself contains a form of logicality, or rationality—something Schopenhauer steadfastly denies, because for him the 'principle' that grounds the world is merely a blind, empty will. If there is anything to be called 'logicality' in the Schopenhauerian world, it pertains not at the metaphysical level, but merely within the intellectual apparatus of finite beings, or, as Hartmann put it disparagingly, 'there is only so much reason to be found in the whole world as the fortuitously arisen brain chooses to put into it.'<sup>30</sup> For Hartmann, by contrast, the world is not only blind, unconscious will, but also *unconscious Idea*. Plümacher states with characteristic brevity that the absolute is the *All-one unconscious spirit* [*der All-eine unbewusste Geist*] of which will and

<sup>29</sup> Hartmann makes this clear in his essay '*Ist der pessimistische Monismus trostlos?*' (Hartmann 1872: 74–8).

<sup>30</sup> Hartmann 1931, III: 149.

representation are attributes (134).<sup>31</sup> The will 'posits the "that" of the world' [*setzt das 'dass' der Welt*—i.e. that it exists], while representation 'determines its "how and what", i.e. the qualitative characteristics of existence' (134).<sup>32</sup> Thus the content of the world exhibits rationality, and the world really has a non-eudaemonological end that it pursues, becoming better as it works towards that end.

Hartmann's alleged 'world-process' takes precedence over everything, to the extent that he urges 'the complete devotion of the personality to the world-process for the sake of its goal, the general world-redemption'.<sup>33</sup> Plümacher relates the pattern of Hartmann's thinking here with beautiful simplicity:

No goal is discernible in nature and in life other than the increase of consciousness.... But this highest goal of nature cannot be the ultimate goal, the end-goal of the world's existence [because it brings increased suffering].... Thus consciousness can be the highest goal within existence only by being the means to an absolute end-goal that lies outside the world. This end-goal is the destruction of the world's existence [*Aufhebung des Welt-daseins*] through the destruction of the will that grounds the world.

(157–8)

This passage achieves in a few words what Hartmann labours to say at length. In his account of world-redemption, he envisages the global cessation of all willing. The process of world-progress increases consciousness, which thereby increases suffering, and ultimately leads to the demand for redemption of the world from itself: in the end the rational element in the world will develop consciousness to a point where it can 'hurl back the total actual volition into nothingness, by which the *process* and the *world ceases*'.<sup>34</sup>

Nietzsche ridiculed this theory of world-redemption, calling Hartmann an 'unconscious parodist'.<sup>35</sup> Frederick Beiser finds 'fantastic' the idea of the world-process reaching its culmination in the world's cessation, and says that it is 'scarcely compatible with the more optimistic side of Hartmann's philosophy, which maintains that life is still worth living at all'.<sup>36</sup> But this latter

<sup>31</sup> Hartmann makes the same point, Hartmann 1931, III: 187–97. However, according to Sebastian Gardner, this is an unconvincing late attempt at explanation on Hartmann's part, and is at odds with Hartmann's basic notion that 'Will and Idea are...alien to one another in all thinkable respects' (Gardner 2010: 190).

<sup>32</sup> The dichotomy of 'that' versus 'how' and 'what' stems from the later Schelling. See Gardner 2010: 187.

<sup>33</sup> Hartmann 1931, III: 133.

<sup>34</sup> Hartmann 1931, III: 142.

<sup>35</sup> UM II: 9/KSA 1: 311–24.

<sup>36</sup> Beiser 2016: 156.

criticism seems out of sympathy with the thrust of Hartmann's admittedly rather troubling argument. If we take seriously the end goal of his world-process, i.e. the world's cessation, then life is worth living, and positive action for change is worth engaging in, *because* the world-process is thereby hastened towards its cessation. Progress is progress towards nothingness. This gives a more unifying interpretation of the pessimism–optimism combination. World-redemption into nothingness does not *conflict* with the optimistic side of Hartmann: it *is* after all the optimistic side. For Hartmann ends by saying 'The logical element . . . ensures that the world is a best possible world, such a one, namely, as attains redemption, not one whose torment is perpetuated endlessly.'<sup>37</sup> This seems to indicate that it is the best world because it can revert to nothingness, because it has within itself an inexorable process towards the achievement of the non-being that was preferable all along. If this is optimism, however, we might wonder whether it would be equally appropriate to call Schopenhauer's position a combination of pessimism and optimism, given that for him the will, while making existence lamentable, also contains the possibility of redemption through its own self-destruction. There are significant differences: Schopenhauer will never say that this world is the best possible, and his mechanism of redemption operates as a kind of psychological conversion, rather than as a 'logical principle' in the world itself, making the will's self-negation individual and contingent rather than global and necessary. But still there is a broader structural similarity: for both Hartmann and Schopenhauer the will makes the world something whose non-existence would have been better, but it also contains the potential for its own elimination.

It is doubtful whether Plümacher or Hartmann can claim to have found a better form of pessimism than Schopenhauer's. The theoretical pessimism itself, while resting on different arguments, claims to arrive only at propositions (i) and (ii), which were asserted by Schopenhauer in the first place. The addition of 'optimism' relies on the post-Hegelian idea of a rational world-process, which Schopenhauer has no reason to accept—indeed, the absence of such a process is arguably one of the more appealing features of the Schopenhauerian world. The defence of action against quietism also seems unconvincing: all agents must subordinate their ends entirely to a remote and self-destructive world-process, and nothing anyone does could bestow sufficient value on existence to make it preferable to non-existence. As Gardner

<sup>37</sup> Hartmann 1931, III: 142.

puts it, 'Hartmann's practical philosophy demands a *total* self-transcendence for which no intelligible motivational root is (or can be) provided.'<sup>38</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Plümacher's close allegiance to Hartmann fixes her writing firmly in her particular portion of the late nineteenth century. Hartmann's combination of optimism and pessimism, which Plümacher accepts as the perfected form of philosophical pessimism, did not prove durable. The conviction that the world comprised a process with an inherent *telos* that it was pursuing with some kind of (albeit unconscious) rationality did not survive, while Schopenhauer's fundamentally non-rational world of striving and suffering retained a greater appeal and proved amenable to more naturalistic appropriations, providing Nietzsche in particular with an urgent existential problem to address. Nietzsche had to struggle with Schopenhauer, but he could ridicule Hartmann. So some central parts of Plümacher's critique of Schopenhauer fail to impress. However, when less restricted by following the details of Hartmann's system, she exhibits intellectual qualities that enable her to bring Schopenhauer's position into sharp focus. Plümacher usefully epitomizes a view of Schopenhauer's pessimism held by his would-be pessimist 'followers', and makes pointed objections that anticipate criticisms by more recent commentators. By locating Schopenhauer within the early nineteenth-century ambience of *Weltschmerz*, she reveals in him a degree of self-regard that seems in tension with his theoretical diminishment of the individual and hostility towards egoism. She is keenly aware that the status of the individual vis-à-vis the world-will is unresolved in Schopenhauer's system, leading to numerous difficulties concerning responsibility, guilt, compassion, and salvation. As we saw, Plümacher rightly accuses Schopenhauer of clinging to remnants of Christianity that are arguably unnecessary for his pessimistic description of the world, and which themselves import irresolvable problems. Finally, as we have also seen, Plümacher's book helped Nietzsche with some useful examples and apt phrases to criticize both Schopenhauer and the modern *Weltschmerzler*, which neither Nietzsche nor the wider scholarly community have acknowledged, but which live on as an unseen legacy in *The Gay Science* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

<sup>38</sup> Gardner 2010: 196.

PART III

NIETZSCHE RESPONDS TO  
SCHOPENHAUER

# Schopenhauer's Christian Perspectives

## 1. Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche hailed Schopenhauer as a 'good European': while German philosophy, typified by Hegel (a 'delayer par excellence'), clung to the remnants of Christian metaphysics and strove to maintain the 'godliness of existence', Schopenhauer, in Nietzsche's view, was up to speed with a 'pan-European event', 'the decline of the faith in the Christian god, the triumph of scientific atheism'.<sup>1</sup> In the 1850s, Schopenhauer himself wrote that Christianity was 'gradually approaching its end, undermined constantly by the sciences' (PP 2, 353/SW 6: 418), that belief in its 'fables' was 'disappearing further every day' (PP I, 121/SW 5: 141), and that humanity was outgrowing religion as such 'like a child's dress, and there's no stopping it—it will burst' (PP 2, 352/SW 6: 417). So Nietzsche's attribution of a historically progressive atheism seems to match Schopenhauer's self-understanding. But in the same passage Nietzsche makes the point—for him a criticism—that Schopenhauer also retains distinctively Christian evaluative perspectives:

As a philosopher, Schopenhauer was the *first* admitted and uncompromising atheist among us Germans. . . . The ungodliness of existence counted for him as something given, palpable, indisputable; . . . unconditional and honest atheism is simply the *presupposition* of his way of putting the problem, as a victory of the European conscience won finally and with great difficulty; as the most fateful act of two thousand years of discipline for truth that in the end forbids itself the *lie* of faith in God. . . . Looking at nature as if it were proof of the goodness and care of a god; interpreting history in honour of some divine reason, as a continual testimony of a moral world order and ultimate moral purposes; interpreting one's own experiences as pious people have long interpreted theirs, as if everything were providential, a hint, designed and ordained for the sake of salvation of the soul—that is *over* now. . . . As we thus reject the Christian interpretation and condemn its

<sup>1</sup> GS, 357/KSA 3: 599.

'meaning' as counterfeit, *Schopenhauer's* question immediately comes at us in a terrible way: *Does existence have any meaning at all?* ... What Schopenhauer himself said in answer to this question was ... a mere compromise, a remaining and staying stuck in precisely those Christian–ascetic moral perspectives, *faith in which had been dismissed* along with faith in God.<sup>2</sup>

Schopenhauer acknowledged a similar two-sidedness in a letter written just before *The World as Will and Representation* was first published:

Although ... there is nothing in it against good morals, and on the contrary in the final book a morality is presented that agrees precisely with true Christian morality; still, the whole philosophy that is expounded stands in a contradiction to the dogmas of Jewish–Christian doctrinal teachings which, while never made explicit, undeniably presents itself in a tacit way.<sup>3</sup>

For Schopenhauer, no religious beliefs<sup>4</sup> are literally true. Hence, religious dogma should be kept separate from philosophy, on pain of pernicious results: 'For during the whole era of Christianity theism lies like an oppressive nightmare on all intellectual and especially philosophical efforts, and inhibits or cripples any progress' (PP 2, 297/SW 6: 349). On the other hand, religious belief can have positive value in its own right. Schopenhauer's dialogue between Philalethes ('lover of truth') and Demopheles ('useful to the common people') in Volume 2 of *Parerga and Paralipomena* makes this clear. Both disputants represent Schopenhauer, and their names reflect the conclusion they reach (see PP 2, 324/SW 6: 382): that religion has two faces, according to whether we ask after its truth or its usefulness. Demopheles holds that it is good if the ordinary mass of people have religious beliefs, for a number of distinct reasons.

First, religious beliefs benefit believers because they satisfy a 'metaphysical need' that is allegedly fundamental to human beings. For Schopenhauer this need is fundamental to the human being (the '*animal metaphysicum*', PP 2, 310/SW 6: 364) and is the origin of both religion and philosophy. Schopenhauer devotes a chapter to this need in the second volume of *The*

<sup>2</sup> GS, 357/KSA 3: 599–601.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Brockhaus, 3 April 1818 (GB, 31), my translation. For a similar passage see WWR 1, 435/SW 2: 483.

<sup>4</sup> Jörg Salaquarda points out the thinness of Schopenhauer's concept of belief (*Glaube*): '*ein bloßes Meinen*', i.e. a purely doxastic holding that something is the case, as opposed to the more complex theological notion of *fiducia*, a personal relation of trust and commitment to God (Salaquarda 2007b: 88–9.) See Swinburne 2005: 142.



*World as Will and Representation* (WWR 2, 169–97/SW 3: 175–209), explaining it as the need to ‘decipher’ our experience and provide an account of what is ‘hidden within or behind’ nature (WWR 2, 192/SW 3: 203). Two claims combine in Demopheles’ argument: ‘mankind absolutely requires *an interpretation* [*Auslegung*] of life’, and ‘it must be suited to their power of comprehension’ (PP 2, 293/SW 6: 344). Though all human beings allegedly have the same need, different grades of ‘metaphysics’ are required to satisfy it. Religion is useful, indeed necessary, as the ‘metaphysics of the people’. However, Demopheles’ concern to benefit the people combines with a contemptuous paternalistic attitude: ‘you have no adequate concept of the miserable capacity of the masses’, he says (PP 2, 303/SW 6: 357)—such is their deficiency that religion is all they can manage. Secondly, Demopheles argues that people’s holding religious beliefs has beneficial social consequences, in that it can ‘prevent them from perpetrating extreme injustice, cruelties, and acts of violence and depravity’ to which they would otherwise be disposed (PP 2, 298/SW 6: 350). This assumes that ‘[t]he human being is at bottom a wild, horrible animal’ (PP 2, 192/SW 6: 225; see also 193–6/SW 6: 226–9), and treats religion as a ‘means of steering, restraining and consoling this race of reason-endowed beasts, whose kinship with the ape does not exclude that with the tiger’ (PP 2, 307/SW 6: 361). Religious belief has also had horrendous consequences, as Philaethes urges: ‘I call to the stand heretic trials and inquisitions, religious wars and crusades, Socrates’ hemlock cup and Bruno and Vanini burning at the stake!’ (PP 2, 293/SW 6: 345; see 294–5, 320/SW 6: 345–7, 377). Still, this is not to deny that there are beneficial consequences, and it is debatable which kind of consequence predominates. In another passage Schopenhauer contemplates a ‘whole millennium [of] ongoing massacre’ and says ‘I wish I had an accurate list of all the crimes that Christianity actually prevented and all the good deeds it actually inspired so that I could put them on the other end of the scale’ (WWR 2, 196–7/SW 3: 209).

These first two arguments are compatible with the falsity of all religious beliefs. However, Demopheles has another more subtle point to make. Some religious beliefs *are true* in a way, but only allegorically (*sensu allegorico*) rather than literally (*sensu proprio*) (see PP 2, 300–3/SW 6: 352–3). There is an allegory at the heart of Christianity that Schopenhauer thinks corresponds to a literal truth uncovered in his philosophy:

the great fundamental truth of Christianity as well as Brahmanism and Buddhism, namely the need for redemption from an existence given over to suffering and death, and our ability to attain this redemption by means of

the negation of the will, that is, by assuming a decisive stand in opposition to nature (WWR 2, 644/SW 3: 722).

The 'literal truth' is this: each human individual, as part of nature, is a manifestation of will, a timeless essence common to all. In virtue of this essence the individual has the disposition to strive towards life—survival and reproduction—but the striving inevitably brings suffering, whose presence makes it the case that existence as a natural, willing individual is something to be regretted. Salvation comes through a change in consciousness that consists in the will negating itself, so that one loses the sense of the individuality upon which natural desires are centred and finds 'peace'. To convince people of this truth, some 'mythical vehicle' is required, but such vehicles are interchangeable, some using a concept of God, others not. This matters less than the fact that the 'literal truth' includes no God.

In this chapter, I shall argue that Nietzsche is right about what Schopenhauer claims to do, that is to say, defend values from a distinctly Christian 'ascetic moral perspective' while 'dismissing faith in God'. My governing aims are: (1) to establish that Schopenhauer is genuinely an atheist; (2) to understand the nature of the Christian values—those of selfless compassion and ascetic release from the world—that he nonetheless espouses; (3) to assess Schopenhauer's claim that Christianity represents truths allegorically; (4) to examine the coherence or plausibility of his position. Merely *continuing* Christian values is not the same as being 'stuck' in them. Nietzsche's claim is that they ought not to survive the death of God and, having supported Nietzsche's description of Schopenhauer, we shall need to enquire whether, in any sense, he is also right in this evaluation.

## 2. The Ungodliness of Existence

For Schopenhauer, any meaningful claim that there is a God is literally false, and his entire system of thought can be stated without use of any concept of God. In his world there is not, and cannot be, any intelligent or even mind-like beings other than finite, living organisms. There is no separate entity that created the universe, nothing perfect, all-benevolent, all-knowing, or all-powerful. There have been attempts to distance Schopenhauer from atheism, most recently by Gerard Mannion.<sup>5</sup> But I shall argue that the case is not

<sup>5</sup> Mannion 2003.

convincing. To begin with, Mannion accepts that Schopenhauer is a 'non-theist'.<sup>6</sup> This point is beyond dispute. Indeed, it would be more accurate to call him an anti-theist. How, if at all, the implied conceptual gap between this position and atheism could be filled using Schopenhauerian materials is, however, a genuine question that we must pursue. Throughout his writings Schopenhauer assumes that 'God' can refer only to a personal deity. On the other hand, as we shall see, his desire to ensure a continuity with venerable tradition leads him to make more concessive remarks to the effect that some talk of God conveys symbolically something that he himself holds literally true. However, I argue that this concession is compatible with atheism, and that nothing of importance to Schopenhauer is lost if no concept of God is ever used.

Schopenhauer gives a psychological explanation for popular belief in gods of any kind: it is grounded in 'the human feeling of helplessness, impotence and dependence in the face of the infinitely superior, inscrutable and mostly ominous powers of nature' and 'the natural human tendency to personify everything' (WWR 1, 542/SW 2: 607). Gods are invented so as to lessen the sense of helplessness by explaining natural powers as a form of agency, and perhaps finding a way of appeasing them. Hume had already exposed this popular theology as 'pitiful' in his *Dialogues on Natural Religion* and *Natural History of Religion* (WWR 1, 541/SW 2: 606). Speculative theology—the academic justifying of belief in God by rational arguments—is another matter. But in this case it is Kant who has, in Schopenhauer's view, already settled the issue. 'Kant dared to produce a doctrine demonstrating that the dogmas which had supposedly been proven so often were in fact unprovable. He dealt the death blow to speculative theology' and brought about 'the complete overthrow of the scholastic philosophy' (WWR 1, 449–50/SW 2: 500–1). Schopenhauer accepts Kant's claim that there are only three such theological proofs, the ontological, the cosmological, and the physico-theological, and agrees with Kant that all three fail to prove there is a God.<sup>7</sup> With that the job is done, in Schopenhauer's eyes. Speculative theology is (or should be) a

<sup>6</sup> Mannion 2003: 42 n. 11.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., PP 1, 97–8/SW 5: 112–13. The ontological argument is, in Schopenhauer's view, a 'sophistical and utterly unconvincing play of concepts' (WWR 1, 541/SW 2: 606). The cosmological argument misuses the principle of sufficient reason: consequences can be necessitated by their grounds, but grounds cannot as such be necessary, and the law of causality 'if it had to guide us from the world to its cause, ... does not allow us to stop at this, but leads us back to the cause of that, and so on remorselessly into infinity' (PP 1, 99/SW 5: 114; also FR, 43–4/SW 4: 41). The physico-theological argument, or argument from design, deserves more respect, but falls foul of the false assumption that there can be teleology in the world only if there is something distinct from the world (WN, 355/SW 4: 39). See Salaquarda 2007a: 80.

thing of the past (WWR 1, 450, 540/SW 2: 501–2, 605)—though he likes to scorn professors who ‘to this day . . . assert quite brazenly that the absolute (as is well known, the newfangled title for the good Lord) and its relation to the world is the real subject matter of philosophy’ (PP I, 103/SW 5: 119). Religious truths cannot be established within philosophy, only by revelation (see FR, 118, 121–2/SW 4: 125, 129). But, Schopenhauer argues (in the voice of Philalethes), a faith based in revelation is suited to the ‘childhood of humanity’ and ‘must perish’ with the advance of science and philosophy (PP 2, 311–12/SW 6: 366–8). Moreover, the revelation of a creator God has only ever happened to the Jewish people, and cannot be assumed to have universal significance (FR, 121–2/SW 4: 129).

Schopenhauer is consistently harsh towards the monotheistic story of a personal creator and seeks to separate it from Christianity, characterizing not only the Old Testament, but theism as such, as ‘Jewish’ and not genuinely Christian.<sup>8</sup> One objection to the monotheistic creator story is the traditional problem of evil: ‘The origin of wickedness is the cliff upon which theism . . . is wrecked’ (PP I, 59/SW 5: 67). This provides a ‘counterproof’ to theism:

[T]he sad constitution of the world whose living beings subsist by devouring each other, the consequent distress and dread of all that is alive, the quantity and colossal magnitude of evils [*Uebel*], the variety and inevitability of sufferings often growing close to the horrible, the burden of life itself and its rush towards bitter death, can honestly not be reconciled with being the supposed result of infinite goodness, wisdom, and power working together.

(PP I, 111/SW 5: 129)

The personal creator God also conflicts with morality as Schopenhauer conceives it. First, he argues, if we are created ‘out of nothing’ by something distinct from ourselves, then we are caused to exist with a certain character or essence, and our actions issue out of that essence. But

neither guilt nor merit can be conceived in a being that, in regard to its existence [*existentia*] and essence [*essentia*], is the work of another. . . . If it

<sup>8</sup> Such remarks are disingenuous, as Christopher Ryan says: ‘Although Schopenhauer characterised these [monotheistic] beliefs as specifically Jewish . . . he also knew that they had been systematically formulated as *sensu proprio* truths by Christians’ (Ryan 2010: 89). Schopenhauer’s presentation of Judaism is seriously oversimplified, and tinged with anti-Semitism when he associates theistic doctrines with the *foetor Judaicus* or ‘Jewish stench’ (see PP 1, 69/SW 5: 78; PP 2, 334–5, 357/SW 6: 394–5, 423).

acts badly, that is a result of its *being* bad, and then the guilt does not belong to it but to him who made it'. (PP I, 112/SW 5: 130)

God's being directly responsible for making us bad is a 'terrible and crushing difficulty' for theism, to avoid which 'people have invented freedom of the will' (PP I, 113/SW 5: 131). But then, Schopenhauer reasons, this is equivalent to God's creating us as a blank, with no essence from which our actions spring. 'That the creator created human beings free implies an impossibility, namely that he endowed them with an existence without essence, thus had given them existence merely in the abstract by leaving it up to them *what* they wanted to exist as' (PP I, 113/SW 5: 131). This objection trades on Schopenhauer's ethics, in which character is inborn and unalterable, the interaction between character and motive produces actions necessarily, and responsibility is felt for what we are rather than what we do.<sup>9</sup> A second ethical objection relies on Schopenhauer's view that the only actions with moral worth are those whose incentive is compassion, the willing of the well-being of another for its own sake (BM, 197–202/SW 4: 205–10). In the usual theistic story 'God, who in the beginning was the creator, appears in the end as revenger and rewarder' (PP I, 112/SW 5: 129), and while it is a 'delusion' that there will ever be reward or punishment in an afterlife, thought of such outcomes can nevertheless motivate action. But then the action is egoistic, and is the antithesis of truly moral behaviour.

So Schopenhauer holds that theism is an affront to human suffering, incapable of rational proof, in conflict with the possibility of moral goodness, conceptually incoherent, motivated by a psychological sense of helplessness, and in fact not even a genuine part of Christianity. This brings us back to the claim that Schopenhauer is not an atheist. Mannion means by this, at least in part, that Schopenhauer is not 'fervently anti-religious', and that he is 'grasping after the meaning of existence'.<sup>10</sup> Both of these statements are true. But both are compatible with denying the existence of God. Unless we can find a positive sense in which Schopenhauer relies on some concept of God, it is better to portray Schopenhauer as an atheist who believes it is perverse not to recognize that the world has a moral meaning (see PP 2, 183/SW 6: 214–15,

<sup>9</sup> See FW, 68–79, 105–9/SW 4: 48–60, 93–8. Schopenhauer does, however, argue for 'transcendental freedom,' suggesting that our 'whole being and essence' is in some sense 'a free deed' at the level of the intelligible character, outside of space, time and causality (FW, 108/SW 4: 97). For discussion see Janaway 2012a (now Chapter 2 of this volume); Shapshay 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Mannion 2003: 79, 83. Mannion argues that Schopenhauer is not a 'militant atheist' (41–3): that is true, in that Schopenhauer does not seek to deprecate religious belief per se or convert believers out of their faith. See Ryan 2010: 95–6.

discussed below), and who praises Christianity and some other religions for their recognition of that meaning.

### 3. The 'True Core' of Christianity

Given the two-sidedness we discerned above in Schopenhauer's position, it is not surprising that commentators have debated how Christian Schopenhauer's philosophy is. Does the 'ungodliness of existence' in his philosophy mark it as anti-Christian, or is there a 'precise agreement' with the moral aspects of Christianity that makes it authentically Christian? The latter option was advocated by Nietzsche's friend Paul Deussen, who called Schopenhauer the *philosophus christianissimus*—the most Christian philosopher.<sup>11</sup> In 1902, Hans Vaihinger was of similar opinion: 'no recent philosopher has penetrated so deeply into the essence of Christianity, and so warmly defended its core, as Schopenhauer.'<sup>12</sup> This view, which has had later adherents in German scholarship,<sup>13</sup> echoes Schopenhauer's own consistent claim that there is a 'true core' to Christianity that can survive the death of God.

The core has an embryonic and a more developed form. In its embryonic form, it comprises certain broadly ascetic moral doctrines of the New Testament:

love of our neighbour as ourselves; beneficence; repayment of hatred with love and good deeds; patience; gentleness; the tolerance of all possible insults without resistance; abstinence in eating for the suppression of desire; resistance to the sex drive (complete resistance, if possible).

(WWR 1, 413/SW 2: 456–7)

Schopenhauer thinks Christianity's familiar metaphysical dogmas merely serve as a vehicle for conveying such ethical precepts. Other religious traditions that lack monotheistic dogma (Brahmanism, Buddhism) are vehicles for similar precepts, which will continue to hold even in the absence of any strictly religious worldview, if humanity really does outgrow them all. Schopenhauer's own account of morality in the Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Representation* and *On the Basis of Morals* treats 'loving kindness'

<sup>11</sup> See Deussen 1915: 8–15. Deussen claims that he reached this view forty-three years earlier.

<sup>12</sup> Vaihinger 1902: 64–5.

<sup>13</sup> For a short survey of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German theorizing about Schopenhauer as a Christian thinker, see Kofler 1999: 11–20.

(*Menschenliebe*) as a cardinal virtue, and equates it with *agapē* or *caritas*, 'which it is the great distinguishing merit of Christianity to have preached' (BM, 217/SW 4: 228). For Schopenhauer *agapē* is love of one individual for arbitrary other individuals in whom one glimpses 'I once more' (BM, 255/SW 4: 272). This is part of the Christian conception, but Schopenhauer must lose the essential Christian connection of such interpersonal love with the love of God.

While the New Testament contains its germ, Christianity only really *becomes itself* later, in Schopenhauer's view: 'In more highly developed Christianity, we see the *ascetic* seed coming into full blossom through the writings of the Christian saints and mystics' (WWR 1, 413/SW 2: 457). Schopenhauer appeals to Meister Eckhart and other German mystics (e.g. Johannes Tauler and the anonymous fourteenth-century *German Theology*<sup>14</sup>) for an endorsement of his own position, in which the concept *God* is empty and redundant. He takes Eckhart's injunction 'that he not look for God outside himself' (WWR 2, 627/SW 3: 704) as a paradigmatic instance of this. Mysticism attains 'consciousness of the identity of one's own being with that of all things' (WWR 2, 628/SW 3: 704), but can literally abandon theism in the process. Thus, while theism 'posits the fundamental source of existence outside of us, as an object', the mystical form of Christianity 'draws this source back into us, as the subject, and the adept ultimately recognizes...that he himself is this source' (WWR 2, 627/SW 3: 703). Schopenhauer thinks that although Eckhart uses the vocabulary of 'unity with God' (see WWR 1, 438/SW 2: 485), he has already reached a point where any separately existing entity as the referent of the word 'God' is dispensable,<sup>15</sup> being 'required to clothe [his ideas] in the garb of Christian mythology' which has become 'little more than a metaphorical language' (WWR 2, 629/SW 3: 705).<sup>16</sup> In his notebooks, Schopenhauer's admiration of Eckhart is tempered by criticism: 'Buddha, Eckhart and I teach essentially the same thing: Eckhart is shackled by his

<sup>14</sup> The latter known as *Theologie Deutsch* or *Theologia Germanica*, referred to by Schopenhauer as *Deutsche Theologie*. Schopenhauer's letters reveal his enthusiasm for this book, which he first read in 1852, and preferred to Eckhart (GB, 277, 425).

<sup>15</sup> Schopenhauer's interpretation of this notion in subject-object language is no doubt anachronistic. Étienne Gilson, for example, summarizes Eckhart thus: 'In order to unite with God, man only has to lock himself up in that "citadel of the soul," where he is no longer distinguished from God, since it is a sharing in the One' (Gilson 1955: 441). It is not that the 'object' God disappears, leaving behind only the 'subject'. Rather there is already an element of the soul that is not distinct from God. God is not distinct from anything, but nor is the soul inasmuch as it, or an aspect of it, is not distinct from God. (See Turner 1995: 163–5.)

<sup>16</sup> Distinctions may become blurred here: One recent commentator asks poignantly, 'Is Eckhart a crypto-atheist, or Schopenhauer a crypto-Christian?' (King 2005: 253–74.) See also Ryan 2010: 112–13.

Christian mythology', and his identification of God and self 'border[s] on the ludicrous' (MR 4, 386/HN 4(i): 28).

The fact that Schopenhauer views Eckhart and other mystics as most authentically Christian and at the same time as requiring no God in order to state their position explains why he can so easily claim his own position to be authentically Christian. On the other hand, Schopenhauer is critical of many mainstream strands of Christianity on the grounds that they either obscure the 'true core' by mixing it with extraneous Old Testament theism, or abandon it by de-emphasizing its core asceticism. For example, in an extended discussion that demonstrates deep research into the history of Christianity (WWR 2, 635–8/SW 3: 712–16), he analyses Clement of Alexandria's discussion of sexual abstinence and rebuts his criticism of earlier views that are considered heretical—Gnostics, Marcionites, and others. Clement 'accuses the Marcionites of finding fault with the Creation... since Marcion teaches that nature is bad and made from bad materials...; and so we should not populate the world but instead refrain from marrying.' Clement's grounds are that this shows 'gross ingratitude, enmity, and rage against the one who made the world' (WWR 2, 636/SW 3: 713–4).<sup>17</sup> But, for Schopenhauer, this is to confront the (so-called) heretics 'only with Judaism and its optimistic creation story' (WWR 2, 635/SW 3: 712), whereas it is these earlier ascetic positions that are *genuinely* Christian. Likewise in modern times, Protestantism is aberrant, for Schopenhauer, because in eliminating asceticism it has 'already abandoned the innermost kernel of Christianity' and turned into a 'comfortable' and 'shallow' rationalism, which, he boldly states, 'is not Christianity' (WWR 2, 640–1/SW 3: 718).

#### 4. Moral Meaning versus the 'antichrist'

Nietzsche is probably right that Schopenhauer's omission of God from the picture was facilitated by the wider intellectual climate (the 'pan-European event') in which scientific inquiry flourished. As we saw, Schopenhauer himself regards the historical progress of science as a prime causal factor in the decline of religious belief. He is pro-science: he has great knowledge of contemporary scientific literature and conceives the empirical world, the world as representation, as consisting exclusively of material objects in space

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting the view of Karl Barth that the views of Marcion and Schopenhauer are parallel in seeing 'creation' as evil (Barth 1958: 337).



and time, exhibiting causal regularities that the various sciences discover and explain (see e.g. WWR 1, 29–32, 51/SW 2: 9–13, 34). Yet to think of Schopenhauer's own position as 'scientific atheism' would be misleading. Nietzsche again shows himself an acute reader of Schopenhauer on this point: 'Much science resounds in his teaching, but what dominates it is not science but the old familiar "metaphysical need".'<sup>18</sup>

For Schopenhauer it is only metaphysics, and not science, that can provide the *meaning* of the world that humanity needs to seek. In an important passage he writes as follows:

That the world has a mere physical but no moral significance [*moralische Bedeutung*] is the greatest, most ruinous and fundamental error, the real *perversity* of the mind and in a basic sense it is certainly that which faith has personified as the antichrist. Nevertheless, and in spite of all religions which assert the contrary of this and seek to establish it in their mythological ways, that basic error never dies out on earth. (PP 2, 183/SW 6: 214–15)<sup>19</sup>

This shows that in respect of the world's having a 'significance' or 'meaning' Schopenhauer is *on the same side as* religion, and specifically of Christianity, as evidenced by that startling equation of the ruinous error with the antichrist. In another passage (PP 2, 94/SW 6: 108), he explains that the error can manifest itself as the view that the world is an end in itself or its own purpose (*Selbstzweck*). If it were a *Selbstzweck*, it would not signify or point to any purpose beyond itself. But the world cannot be its own purpose, since in that case it would have to be perfect and contain no suffering (WWR 2, 592/SW 3: 662). Instead it 'manifests itself as a *means* to a higher purpose [*Mittel zu einem höheren Zweck*]' (PP 2, 94/SW 6: 108). This is what we must recognize if we are to avoid 'perverse' thinking.

Nietzsche also talks of finding a meaning [*Sinn*] in existence, and recognizes that Schopenhauer locates two distinct meanings juxtaposed within Christianity. We may call them the Theistic Meaning and the Ascetic Meaning. According to the first (which, as we saw, Schopenhauer regards as incorporated into Christianity without being genuinely Christian), existence is good because the all-wise, all-benevolent creator made it so. Schopenhauer repeatedly mocks this view, which he encapsulates in the Septuagint's formula

<sup>18</sup> HH I, 26/KSA 2: 47.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche's familiarity with this passage is shown by Section 5 of his 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism,' prefaced in 1886 to *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT, 'Attempt', 5/KSA 1: 17–18).

πάντα καλὰ λίαν ('everything was very good'). Interpreting the world in that way involves the kinds of attitude Nietzsche mentions: 'Looking at nature as if it were proof of the goodness and care of a god; interpreting history . . . as a continual testimony of a moral world order and ultimate moral purposes' and so on. *That* meaning is now 'over' for Schopenhauer and for European intellectual life in general. However, Schopenhauer finds—also in Christianity—another, opposed 'meaning': existence is lamentable, something that ought not to be, and the true end or purpose of life (*Zweck des Lebens*, see e.g. WWR 2, 508, 651/SW 3: 563, 730) is found in a turn away from the world into the peace of total will-lessness and loss of the individual self.

The chief difference between religions, for Schopenhauer, is whether they are optimistic or pessimistic.<sup>20</sup> Christianity is pessimistic, and pessimism is its best feature:

The nucleus and heart of Christianity are the doctrines of the Fall, original sin, the wickedness of our natural state and the corruption of natural mankind, connected with the intercession and reconciliation through the redeemer, in which one shares through faith in him. Thus, however, all of this reveals itself as pessimism . . . This is why the Old Testament and the New Testament are diametrically opposed and their unification forms a weird centaur. For the Old Testament is optimism, the New Testament pessimism. (PP 2, 349/SW 6: 412–13)

This message is hammered home repeatedly throughout Schopenhauer's works: 'Do not think for a moment that Christian doctrine is favorable to optimism; on the contrary, in the Gospels, "world" and "evil [*Uebel*]" are used as almost synonymous expressions' (WWR 1, 352/SW 2: 358); optimism is 'irreconcilable with Christianity' (WWR 2, 600/SW 3: 671). Schopenhauer holds that, given the nature of our existence, it would have been better not to have existed: 'A mature weighing of the matter yields the result that complete non-being [*das gänzliche Nichtseyn*] would be preferable to an existence [*Daseyn*] like ours' (PP 2, 242/SW 6: 285).<sup>21</sup> It is here that we find the key to the 'moral meaning' of the world. The world does not just exist, but rather

<sup>20</sup> See PP 2, 349/SW 6: 412. On criteria for the optimism/pessimism distinction see Vanden Auweele 2015: 53–71.

<sup>21</sup> Variations of this thought occur at WWR 1, 350/SW 2: 383; WWR 2, 482, 523, 591–2/SW 3: 531, 581, 661; PP 1, 273/SW 5: 333; PP 2, 19, 259–60/SW 6: 306–7. In the 1870s and 1880s this was recognized as the heart of philosophical pessimism. See Plümacher 1888: 1: 'Modern philosophical pessimism, . . . means the axiological judgement: *the sum of displeasure outweighs the sum of pleasure*:

contains within itself the higher purpose of turning us away from itself. It is a normative truth that the world ought not to exist; its essential nature, as will, is such that we have reason to regard its non-existence as preferable. '[I]t is precisely pain and suffering that work towards the true goal [*den wahren Zweck*] of life, the turning of the will away from it' (WWR 2, 651/SW 3: 731). This is the 'great fundamental truth', the pessimistic truth about the meaning of existence, that Schopenhauer finds at the heart of Christianity (see WWR 2, 644/SW 3: 722).

## 5. Salvation and the Word 'God'

Schopenhauer does not leave us with the 'sad constitution of the world' and no remedy. Though this world as will cannot be reconciled with theism, there is salvation from it, and indeed a would-be Christian salvation: the self-negation of the natural, willing self, which brings a release from the existence that ought not to be. In that release the individual attains a kind of reabsorption into the undifferentiated whole, a state of 'blissfulness' or 'peace' akin to that recognized by different religions.<sup>22</sup> Mannion suggests that this doctrine of salvation 'could' form the basis 'for belief in some form of ultimate reality analogous to conceptions of God and/or the good'.<sup>23</sup> But while someone might conceivably think something of this nature, the immediate question is whether Schopenhauer does. I shall argue that he does not.

In his very early notebooks (1809–10) Schopenhauer used the term 'the kingdom of God' to describe a state in which evil is diminished by voluntarily taking on suffering (MR 1: 10/HN 1: 10). He then moved to using the term 'better consciousness' to characterize the timeless, redemptive state that contrasts with ordinary empirical consciousness, and stopped using the term 'God', which could apply only to something with the qualities of personality and causality ('as soon as we remove these, we may well speak of God, but we can no longer have any conception of him'). The better consciousness 'lifts me into a world where there is no longer personality and causality', in other words a godless world. As a consequence he says 'I hope that it is no God'

*consequently the non-being of the world would be better than its being*' (my translation). See also Beiser 2014: 160, 218–19; Dahlkvist 2007: 37, 222. (Additional note: on Plümacher see also Chapter 7 of this volume.)

<sup>22</sup> See especially WWR 1, 406–16/SW 2: 448–60.

<sup>23</sup> Mannion 2003: 67.

(MR 1: 44/HN 1: 42). In 1827 he again refuses any literal use of 'God' except for a personal creator: '[i]n all languages the word God means a person [*einen Menschen*] who has made the world, however much we may paraphrase and disguise this. Therefore to avoid misunderstanding, we must not use the word' (MR 3: 376/HN 1: 344). Later, in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, his attitude appears resolute: '[a]n impersonal God is no God at all, but merely a misused word, a non-concept, a contradiction in terms' (PP I, 105/SW 5: 122), 'a mere philosophy professor's fib' (PP I, 170/SW 5: 202). He is similarly dismissive of pantheism:

Against pantheism I have mainly only this: that it does not mean anything. Naming the world God does not mean explaining it, but instead only enriching language with a superfluous synonym for 'world.' Whether you say 'the world is God' or 'the world is the world' amounts to the same. . . . [I]f one proceeds from what is actually given, hence from the world, and now says 'the world is God', it is plain as day that nothing is said by this.

(PP 2, 92–3/SW 6: 106)

So if salvation consists in some relation in which we stand towards 'ultimate reality', these remarks give little scope for describing this as our standing in some relation to God. If 'the world is God' amounts to 'the world is the world', how could 'ultimate reality is God' say anything other than 'ultimate reality is ultimate reality', thereby becoming indistinguishable from atheism?

Some of the remarks we have considered here are accompanied by more concessive words. Thus: '[I]f anyone wants to use the expression *God* symbolically for that better consciousness itself or for much that we are unable to separate and to name, so let it be, yet not among philosophers I should have thought' (MR 1: 44/HN 1: 42). Also:

[I]f . . . we wish to call 'God' that which is opposed to the world [i.e. that which negates the will to life] . . . , then this could be done for the benefit of those who do not want to drop the expression. Yet it would stand merely for an unknown *x* of which only the negation is known to us . . . .

Of such a God we could have no other theology than precisely the one which Dionysius the Areopagite furnishes in his *Theologia mystica*; this consists merely in the explanation that all the predicates of God can be denied, but not one can be affirmed . . . . This theology is the only true one; but it has no content [*Inhalt*] at all.

(MR 3: 376–7/HN 3: 343–5, translation modified)

Finally: 'If there are some among the *theists* who mean *Nirvana* by the name God, then we do not want to argue with them over the name. It is the *mystics* who seem to understand it this way' (PP 2, 94/SW 6: 108). What are we to make of these pronouncements?

The first point to note is that all these remarks begin with 'if'; the second is that Schopenhauer himself does not satisfy the if-clause: he does not want to continue using the word 'God'. It is only *if* one 'proceeded from God as though he were the given and the thing to be explained' (PP 2, 93/SW 6: 106) that uses of 'God' for the world or a transcendent reality could seem meaningful. If instead one 'proceeds from what is actually given, hence from the world', then 'nothing is said' by such utterances (PP 2, 92/SW 6: 106). Then atheism is the default position. It 'possesses the right of first occupancy and first has to be driven from the field by theism' (PP I, 105/SW 5: 133). Even the term 'atheism' is a prejudicial, carrying 'a cunning, underhanded and furtive insinuation' that theism has some kind of priority or self-evidence (MR 4, 12/HN 4(i): 2). But far from being a self-evident starting-point, theism is parochial, in Schopenhauer's view, to the extent that instead of 'atheism' 'one should say: "non-Judaism", and instead of "atheist," non-Jew' (FR, 121/SW 4: 129). Since he is doctrinally a virulent 'non-Jew', Schopenhauer must regard himself as an atheist, even if he does not like the term as such.

Thus, although Schopenhauer's remark on Dionysius and negative theology is suggestive of continuities, it requires careful treatment.<sup>24</sup> Dionysius produces an intricate Neoplatonist construct in which, according to a recent interpretation, the apophatic (negating) and cataphatic (affirming) approaches are inseparably intertwined, so that '[we] must both affirm and deny all things of God; and then we must negate the contradiction between the affirmed and the denied.'<sup>25</sup> The project would not start were it not for positive assertions about God, so Dionysius must be classed as someone who 'proceeds from God'. Schopenhauer, by contrast, 'proceeds from the world'. The given, for him, is the natural world in which there exist individual beings whose essence is will. The self finds itself existing as an individuated entity which is a manifestation of the mindless striving tendency in nature. As this individuated self, which by nature it regards as the centre of the world, it strives for its own well-being, but inevitably encounters suffering. Intense suffering, or enlightened identification with the suffering of all individuated beings, facilitates a

<sup>24</sup> Mannion 2003: 86 suggests that Schopenhauer 'commends' Dionysius; by contrast, Matthias Kofler finds Schopenhauer here recognizing the 'misleading proximity' (*verführerische Nähe*) of negative theology to his own thought (Kofler 1999: 184).

<sup>25</sup> Turner 1995: 22.

negation of its will and a loss of its sense of being an individual and releases it from the strivings and sufferings that are constitutive of life, into a blissful peace. Schopenhauer's concession to those who wish to retain the mere word 'God' is designed to sustain his claim that the Christian mystics are propounding what is essentially his own godless view of world and salvation, merely using different terms.

However, this is not just a matter of choosing or not choosing to use the word 'God'. Let us accept that for salvation from this world to be possible, there has to be, in Schopenhauer's view, some source for the negation of individual willing, and an ultimate, non-differentiated reality that encompasses the will-less subject. What is ultimate reality? The immediate answer appears to be *will*, which Schopenhauer repeats states is the thing in itself. But there is nothing good or God-like in the world as will. In a well-known passage, Schopenhauer concedes that 'will' designates only the essence of the world as we can know it, the world in which we strive as individual beings, and not ultimate reality:

the...question: what in the end is this will, which presents itself in the world and as the world, ultimately in itself?... This question is *never* to be answered.... But the possibility of this question shows that the thing in itself (which we cognize most directly in willing) may have—entirely outside of any possible appearance—determinations, properties, and ways of being that entirely elude our grasp or cognition, but which would remain as the essence of the thing in itself even when, as we have shown in the Fourth Book, it has freely annulled itself as *will*.

(WWR 2, 209/SW 3: 221–2, translation modified)

If ultimate reality transcends our capacities for literal comprehension—as indeed does God in Christian mysticism—then our identification with it may wrest us away from the will. But even at the level of metaphor (or of sheer hope), Schopenhauer finds no trace of goodness in this ultimate reality beyond will. If anything is good here, it is the subjective state of will-less consciousness. Schopenhauer struggles even to say that this state is good—only figuratively can it be called the highest good, because 'good' applies only to satisfactions of the will.<sup>26</sup> But even if the state of will-lessness can be considered good, Schopenhauer never hints at there being goodness in the world regarded ultimately and absolutely in itself.

<sup>26</sup> See WWR 1, 389/SW 2: 427–8; also Janaway 2016b [now Chapter 4 of this volume].

## 6. Sin and Grace

While Schopenhauer thinks that many religions contain allegorical truth, he has specific and detailed views about Christianity in this regard:

Christian doctrine symbolizes *nature*, the *affirmation of the will to life*, using *Adam* . . . ; the sin that we inherited from Adam, i.e. our unity with him in the Idea, which is expressed temporally through the bond of procreation, causes us all to share in suffering and eternal death. Conversely, Christian doctrine symbolizes *grace*, the *negation of the will*, *redemption*, in the form of God become man, who, being free from all sinfulness, i.e. from all life-will, cannot have arisen from that most decisive affirmation of the will as we did.

(WWR 1, 432/SW 2: 479)

Schopenhauer's commitment to the allegorical significance of the Fall into original sin (*Sündenfall*) and the restoration of grace (*Gnade*) stems from a deep engagement with the works of Augustine and Luther.<sup>27</sup> He likens these Christian doctrines respectively to affirmation and negation of the will. But difficulties arise from the closeness of the assimilation he makes: it becomes hard to disentangle what is allegorical and what literal, or what aspects of the allegory are supposed to carry over into the literally true account. To put the point bluntly, what has the individual human being fallen away from, in Schopenhauer's world? Why should ordinary human existence, problematic as it may be, be regarded as having a property analogous to sinfulness? And whence, literally, could something analogous to God's grace emanate?

Schopenhauer cites with approval the *German Theology*, in which

it says . . . that the fall of the devil, like that of Adam, consisted of the one, like the other, attributing to himself I and Me, Mine and to Me [*das Ich und Mich, das Mein und Mir*]. On p. 89 it says: 'In true love there is neither I nor Me, Mine, to Me, You, Yours, and the like'. (WWR 2, 628/SW 3: 705)

In the setting of the *German Theology*, there is a source for this true love, namely the 'Perfect Good' which is God, and within the created being there is a cognitive capacity (the 'True Light') by virtue of which he or she is a 'partaker

<sup>27</sup> On Schopenhauer and Augustine, see Koßler 1999: 27–169, and on affirmation and negation of the will esp. 80–102. On the relation with Luther, see Koßler 1999: 309–421; Malter 1982: 22–53; and Malter 1991: 421–7.

of the divine nature'.<sup>28</sup> Sin is the state in which 'the creature turneth away from the unchangeable Good.' So when Adam 'was lost, or fell...because of his claiming something for his own, and because of his I, Mine, Me, and the like', this was equivalent to his losing a relation to the Good and that part of himself that partakes in it.<sup>29</sup> Now for Schopenhauer, we also 'fall' into individuation: the human being, in existing, takes his or her individual, empirical 'person' as a reality upon which the world is centred, and naturally desires its well-being. But the difference is that anterior to this fall there was no good or perfection, just the world existing without this individual. The negative valence of *sin* therefore seems inappropriate in Schopenhauer's theory. There is nothing absolutely good that we have fallen from. All that we have 'turned away' from is non-existence, or more precisely non-individuated existence (since Schopenhauer holds that we somehow timelessly exist as the undifferentiated will (see especially PP 2, 241–54/SW 6: 284–300)). Our 'fallen', natural state is certainly not good, because of the ubiquity of suffering, but our individual non-existence, though 'preferable', is really neither good nor bad, if we take seriously Schopenhauer's claim that these predicates attach by definition to what is in accord or in conflict with what is willed. Individual non-existence can be merely 'the peace of the all-sufficient nothing' (WWR 2, 595/SW 3: 665). It seems misconceived and unnecessary, then, to assimilate the ill of our suffering-ridden individuated existence to *sin*. Indeed, it seems perverse and punitive when Schopenhauer goes so far as to state that our existence resembles a desire that is worthy of punishment (*strafbar*) and (quoting Luther in support) that 'every great pain, whether physical or mental, tells us what we deserve' (WWR 2, 596/SW 3: 666). All he would need to say is that suffering is not an aberration, but rather constitutive of our existing as individual manifestations of will.<sup>30</sup> The contents of the allegory here begin to leak into the literal account.

Similar difficulties attend the notion that salvation is attained through something like the grace of God. If grace pertains to a personal god's loving relationship towards creation, then Schopenhauer is entitled only to some very remote analogue of it. He writes that when the will abolishes itself, the subject undergoes an 'entrance into freedom' that 'arrives suddenly, as if flying in from outside', and 'without any effort on our part', adding 'that is precisely

<sup>28</sup> *Theologia Germanica* 1966: 108–9.

<sup>29</sup> *Theologia Germanica* 1966: 37–8.

<sup>30</sup> This also calls into question Schopenhauer's assimilation of his position to Buddhism, which (as Nietzsche puts it) replaces 'war against *sin*' with 'war against suffering' (A, 20/KSA 6: 186).



why the church calls it *the effect of divine grace*' (WWR 1, 432–3/SW 2: 478–9). Any 'effort on our part' would be willing, and would not be free, as both Augustine and Luther agree. So it is *as if* something outside of us freely acts upon us, and *as if* something within us accepts the release from the natural, individuated willing self. But is a negation of the will supposed to explain what grace is, or the other way around? On the one hand, Schopenhauer characterizes grace in his own terms, without God, as 'that mode of cognition that renders all motives ineffective, that serves as a universal *Quietiv* to quell all willing' (WWR 1, 418/SW 2: 463). On the other hand, he states that

by recalling the dogmas of the Christian church, we were able to explain and elucidate the apparent contradiction between the necessity that accrues to all expressions of character given certain motives (the kingdom of nature) on the one hand, and the freedom of the will in itself to negate itself and to abolish the character along with all the necessity that accrues to motives grounded in character (the kingdom of grace) on the other hand.

(WWR 1, 435–6/SW 2: 483)

The will's freely abolishing itself is notoriously difficult for Schopenhauer to explain. Placing this occurrence in a 'kingdom of grace' either provides just an arbitrary name for the mystery, or hopes to gain credence from the sense this has in established Christian doctrine. What Schopenhauer calls 'recalling the dogmas of the Christian church' amounts to a fairly detailed exegesis of Luther's doctrines in his works *De servo arbitrio* and *De libertate Christiana*. As Rudolf Malter argues, here Schopenhauer creates for himself 'a situation that should not happen':<sup>31</sup> relying on theology to explain his supposed literal philosophical truth, in violation his principle that philosophy must discover truth independently and look to religion and theology only for allegories that help to communicate it.

## 7. Conclusion: Nietzsche's Verdict

We have argued that Nietzsche's description of Schopenhauer's position as combining atheism with Christian ascetic-moral perspectives is essentially correct. But what of Nietzsche's evaluation? Is Schopenhauer 'stuck' with

<sup>31</sup> Malter 1991: 424.

these perspectives? Should he have abandoned 'faith' in them along with faith in God? Schopenhauer's ethical views are to some extent backward-looking in virtue of the fact that their pedigree stretches through centuries of Christian thought. But the age of such views per se argues *against* them just as little as Schopenhauer thinks it argues *for* them. A distinct objection might be that, independently of their origins, Schopenhauer's moral-ascetic values are such that there is reason to reject them in their own right. Nietzsche calls them into question as 'life-denying' and 'anti-natural'. But Schopenhauer's reply would be that turning against life and nature is precisely what we have most reason to do. Which of these views is preferable is not decided by one's commitment to atheism. There is no contradiction in rejecting all use of the concept *God* and at the same time claiming that the ethical prescriptions of the New Testament are definitive of morality and ought to be acted upon universally. There could well be other reasons for upholding the same morality. There is likewise no contradiction in rejecting the concept *God* and claiming that the nature of human existence calls for a transition into a state of will-lessness in which one detaches from the sense of self as individual.

There are, however, at least two reasons for thinking that Schopenhauer is indeed held captive by the Christian picture. The first is his embrace of specifically Christian concepts, in particular *grace* and *original sin*, which are either unnecessary for his distinctive atheistic position, or impossible to integrate into it. For Schopenhauer's central ethical claims to hold, we do not need to be sinful or worthy of punishment, merely constitutively prone to suffering from which an ultimate release is sought, and it is unclear how a literal analogue for sin can coherently arise in his thought. For us to become will-less subjects of cognition does not require grace to emanate from anywhere, and there is, literally, nowhere within his system for it to come from. But Schopenhauer seems prepared to rely on these richer theological notions to intimate that there is more content to his own account than he can literally provide. At the very least, he is guilty of promoting his case through notions whose intelligibility depends on a concept of God that he eschews.

The second reason for regarding Schopenhauer as 'stuck' in his ascetic-moral perspective invokes a wider consideration concerning the 'metaphysical need'. Nietzsche writes:

The metaphysical need is not the origin of religion, as Schopenhauer has it, but only a *late offshoot* of it. Under the rule of religious ideas, one has got used to the idea of 'another world (behind, below, above)' and feels an unpleasant emptiness and deprivation at the annihilation of religious

delusions—and from this feeling grows ‘another world’, but this time only a metaphysical and not a religious one.<sup>32</sup>

This is a serious genealogical objection to Schopenhauer. It alleges that Schopenhauer is heir to the ancestral Christian view of the world from the start, and that it retains an insidious priority for him. Schopenhauer simply *assumes* that it is a fundamental and perverse error to think that the world has no moral significance and indicates no higher purpose beyond itself. That this assumption can be questioned is already an objection. But even more telling is Schopenhauer's equation of the alleged error with ‘the antichrist’. This more or less says that to question the priority of the metaphysical need is to lapse from Christianity's most basic premise. In this sense, Schopenhauer is within the ambit of Christianity from start to finish. A different kind of atheist would have no place at all for metaphysics in Schopenhauer's sense, no place for a ‘meaning’ or ‘significance’ of the kind he seeks. But Schopenhauer is in the end an atheist who is ‘stuck’, unable to rid himself of the quest for a substitute metaphysics to ensure the kind of meaning Christianity had seemed to provide.

<sup>32</sup> GS, 151/KSA 3: 494.

# On the Very Idea of ‘Justifying Suffering’

## 1. Introduction

C. S. Lewis once wrote: ‘In a sense, [Christianity] creates, rather than solves, the problem of pain, for pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think a good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving.’<sup>1</sup> The Christian solution to its problem is theodicy, a justification of God. Theodicy aims to show that the pain and suffering in reality does not contradict God’s essential nature as righteous and loving—suffering is justified because God’s action is justified: there were good reasons for it. But if Lewis is right, then if we could banish all thought of God, and also of ultimate reality’s being somehow directed toward, or in tune with, our good, then the same problem would not arise. Lewis boldly states that pain would then be ‘no problem’. We may not agree with that as a general claim. But at least without God, suffering would not present the problem Lewis identifies.

My assumption in what follows is that Nietzsche is a thinker who aspires to banish all thought of God, and also of any ultimate reality that is somehow directed toward, or in tune with, our good. So is there any sense in which Nietzsche is concerned with theodicy, or something significantly like it? Some commentators say so. One view is that this is a concern for Nietzsche throughout his career. Aaron Ridley writes of ‘Nietzsche’s attempts—early, middle and late—to offer a kind of aesthetic theodicy that would ward off the temptations of nihilism and despair’,<sup>2</sup> and describes Nietzsche’s position as ‘a kind of naturalized theodicy . . . [a] perspective on our circumstances from which even the most grim-seeming of them can be regarded as indispensable to us’.<sup>3</sup> Daniel Came says that Nietzsche ‘always maintained . . . that the dreadful aspects of the human and natural worlds call for something like a theodicy, a mode of justification that would allow the troubled soul to find a place in them’.<sup>4</sup> An opposed view is that Nietzsche was never genuinely in a business that it is right to call theodicy. Thus Sebastian Gardner states that even *The*

<sup>1</sup> Lewis 2012: 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ridley 2013: 430.

<sup>3</sup> Ridley 2007: 135–7.

<sup>4</sup> Came 2005: 41.

*Birth of Tragedy* sees tragedy as a 'liberation from theodicy' because of its 'refusal to tell us that we should affirm how things are because they are as they ought to be'.<sup>5</sup>

Others say that Nietzsche starts out with an ambition to provide a theodicy, but abandons it. In the view of Raymond Geuss, *The Birth of Tragedy* is concerned with a kind of theodicy, but after a 'change of heart',<sup>6</sup> 'the whole project' of giving a theodicy 'fall[s] by the wayside' for the later Nietzsche.<sup>7</sup> According to Simon May, Nietzsche is in a more ambivalent position: he begins his career 'overtly in the business of theodicy', that is of 'justifying... sufferings in terms of higher goals',<sup>8</sup> but then later adopts a 'direction of movement away from theodicy'<sup>9</sup> toward a distinct notion of life affirmation (seen in the ideal of *amor fati*) that aspires to affirm suffering without thinking of it as redeemed by some higher value that it enables. On May's view, then, Nietzsche develops a notion of affirmation that is distinct from theodicy or any attempt to justify suffering—a distinction I shall briefly return to at the end of this piece. Still, May argues, Nietzsche retains at the same time the aspiration to find suffering redeemed by higher values, and so is never wholly outside the tradition of theodicy.

In this paper I start from a sceptical base: for me it will be an open question whether terms such as 'theodicy' or 'justifying suffering' will be helpful in getting Nietzsche's views into focus. Nietzsche does not very often use these terms as such. There are three published occurrences of 'theodicy', all before 1876, two of them used disapprovingly in criticisms of David Strauss and Christian historians, the other in *The Birth of Tragedy* (discussed below).<sup>10</sup> And although Nietzsche uses the notion of justification (*Rechtfertigung*) copiously, it is hard to find passages in which Nietzsche talks literally of 'justifying suffering'.<sup>11</sup> These textual details will not matter much if it turns out that we interpret Nietzsche well when we apply such terms. But then the more

<sup>5</sup> Gardner 2013: 605 n. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Geuss 1999: 105.

<sup>7</sup> Geuss 1999: 109.

<sup>8</sup> May 2011a: 88, 80.

<sup>9</sup> May 2011a: 91.

<sup>10</sup> The word *Theodicee* occurs eleven times in Nietzsche's entire output, published and unpublished. The three published uses are at BT, 3; UM 1: 7/KSA 1: 197; UM 4: 3/KSA 1: 445 (the last also pre-drafted at KSA 8: 230). Three early unpublished uses are reworkings of the same point about the Greeks lacking a theodicy—see note 28). Another early use is at KSA 7: 203. There are three late occurrences in unpublished fragments from 1887 (KSA 12: 144, 468, 533).

<sup>11</sup> I can locate only two published passages where suffering (*Leiden*) or evil (*Uebel*) is the explicit object of a *Rechtfertigung*. One is GM II: 7/KSA 5: 304, where Nietzsche observes—without approving—the psychological tendency to find suffering justified if it is spectated by a god. The other is HH 1: 591/KSA 2: 339, where Nietzsche says that everyone will find a patch of happiness amid misfortune, like a 'little garden' upon 'volcanic soil', then adds: 'only it would be ludicrous [*lächerlich*] to say that with this happiness suffering itself is justified.'

pressing problem is giving an account of just how we are to understand the terms themselves.

## 2. Questions about Theodicy and Justification

Nobody of course thinks that Nietzsche is involved in a *literal* theodicy in anything like the original sense intended by Leibniz. Since for Nietzsche 'belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable' (GS, 343/KSA 3: 573), we can have at most a theodicy without the *theos*. A better name for this might be sought. In 1902 Hans Vaihinger commented that while Leibniz wrote a theodicy, 'Nietzsche gives a cosmody, a physiodicy, a biodicy: he justifies the world, nature, life.'<sup>12</sup> In a recent article David McPherson agrees that Nietzsche's problem is indeed that of finding a cosmody, that is, 'the problem of justifying life in the world as worthwhile in light of the prevalent reality of suffering.'<sup>13</sup> 'Cosmody' may well seem the better term at the very least for the statement in *The Birth of Tragedy* that 'existence and the world are eternally justified' (BT, 5/KSA 1:47). (Perhaps justification of existence should be 'ontody', and justification of suffering 'pathody'? In fact the latter term—as *Pathodizee*—was used in the mid-twentieth century by Viktor Frankl in his formulation of the therapeutic task of giving meaning to suffering, born out of his experiences in concentration camps.)<sup>14</sup>

However, it would be merely pedantic to dismiss the idea of a theodicy without *theos* as ill-conceived, because the term has other uses. For example, as Geuss points out, Hegel appropriated it to designate 'the whole programme of showing us that our absolute need for reconciliation with the world as a whole... was satisfied.'<sup>15</sup> And Susan Neiman comments (albeit in somewhat different terms) that in general philosophical discourse the term simply has a narrower and a broader sense: 'Theodicy, in the narrow sense, allows the believer to maintain faith in God in the face of the world's evils. Theodicy, in the broad sense, is any way of giving meaning to evil that helps us face despair.'<sup>16</sup> Commentators who attribute a theodicy to Nietzsche clearly do so

<sup>12</sup> Vaihinger 1902: 59.

<sup>13</sup> McPherson 2016: 40. McPherson states that Nietzsche does not use the term (41–2). That is in fact untrue. In 1872, Erwin Rohde suggested the term *Kosmodicee* to Nietzsche in a discussion of how to advertise Nietzsche's forthcoming book, and Nietzsche used it occasionally—though admittedly there is only one published use, in the essay on David Strauss (UM 1: 7/KSA 1: 197). Of unpublished occurrences, all but one (KSA 10: 533) are in the early period of 1872–3 (see KSA 1, 825; KSA 7: 526, 597; KSB 3: 294).

<sup>14</sup> See Frankl 1950.

<sup>15</sup> Geuss 1999: 82–3.

<sup>16</sup> Neiman 2002: 239.

in *some* broad sense—or senses, for their formulations differ considerably. This brings with it two interpretive questions: (1) Is ‘theodicy’ now so broad a term as to become unacceptably diffuse and uninformative? (2) In adopting the idea of a theodicy without God, do we risk reading into Nietzsche’s writings residual aspects of the original narrow (or literal) conception—theodicy with God—that do not belong there?

For instance, how readily does the very notion of *justification* transfer into broad theodicy? If God is out of the picture, then at least in one obvious sense, the phrase ‘justifying suffering’ most readily applies only to acts where human agents *cause* or *allow* some particular kind of suffering. For example, faced with mass casualties and limited resources in the aftermath of an earthquake, one might be justified in not treating a five-year-old child’s painful but non-life-threatening injuries. One could justify that action by giving an account of some reasons. To say that the child’s suffering was justified, or that I can justify the child’s suffering, would at best be a shorthand way of saying my action was justified, or is amenable to a justifying account. There is no obvious sense in which the painful injury, taken by itself, was justified. Or we might debate whether instead the pain and distress of undergoing chemotherapy would be a justified suffering, or whether the alternative suffering from having a tumour in the lung would be justified. But if we decided for latter, that naturally occurring pain and distress *itself* could not readily be said to be justified, independently of our allowing it to occur. In other kinds of case, sufferings might arguably be justified, in the sense of deserved, as punishments, but the same point applies: it seems to be the *infliction* of the suffering that is really the candidate for justification. Yet again, suffering might in some circumstances be justly distributed. If food is scarce, a just state of affairs might be one in which every member of the group experiences a degree of continual gnawing hunger, so that all may stay alive. But again what seems justified, or susceptible to a justifying account, is not exactly the gnawing pain, rather the allowing or enforcing of the particular distribution.

In narrow, or literal, theodicy there can in principle be a global justification of this kind for suffering’s occurrence, that is, of God’s *creating* a world that contains all the sufferings that occur, or God’s *allowing* there to be all the sufferings. But, with God’s agency out of the picture, what remains? Here the worry about diffuseness comes in. ‘Justifying’ something now seems to amount simply to there being *some positive attitude or other* that we can, or perhaps should, take toward it. Consider the above formulations: if *x* stands for ‘suffering’, ‘life’, or ‘the world’, we might be concerned with ‘justifying *x* as worthwhile’, ‘giving meaning to *x*’, ‘satisfying the need for reconciliation with

$x$ ', 'affirming  $x$  because it is as it ought to be', 'allowing the troubled soul to find a place in  $x$ ', 'warding off temptations of nihilism and despair about  $x$ ', 'regarding  $x$  as indispensable (*sc.*, valuable) to us'. One sceptical query is whether the notion of *justification* is the most appropriate representative of this range of attitudes; another is whether there will be *any* single notion that they all converge upon, either in Nietzsche's texts or in the interpretive apparatus we are applying to them. A further possible obscurity concerns the *object* of the positive attitude that is to be achieved: we see 'life', 'existence', 'the world', and 'suffering' occupying this role. These objects are not necessarily exclusive of one another. If I am positive toward 'existence', then presumably I am positive toward whatever exists, life and suffering both included. Yet in principle one can be positive toward existence, or to one's own life, without being at all positive toward suffering, even to the extent of finding it justified in relation to something else.

Both kinds of diffuseness are to some extent down to Nietzsche himself. Consider his well-known verdict on mankind hitherto: 'He did not know how to justify, to explain, to affirm himself; he suffered from the problem of his meaning. . . . [T]he answer was missing to the scream of his question: "to what end suffering?"' (GM III: 28/KSA 5: 411). Justifying, explaining, affirming, finding a meaning, finding an end (literally a 'what-for' (*ein Dazu*))—are these all the same attitude? And are 'himself' (his existence) and 'suffering' in effect the same object that is to be justified, explained, or affirmed? There is no clear answer on either count. Immediately after this passage Nietzsche goes on to state that the ascetic ideal provided what was lacking—that is to say, at least a serviceable positive attitude to existence, suffering, and self. Perhaps some reflection on the ascetic ideal will give us more purchase on the issues? Schopenhauer's philosophy provides the best illustration of the ascetic ideal. But we shall find that Schopenhauer gives grist to the sceptical mill, because he offers both a *meaning* for existence, and a *justification*, but no *affirmation*.

### 3. Schopenhauer and the Meaning of Existence

In Nietzsche's day the definitive statement of the position known as philosophical pessimism was: 'the non-being of the world would be better than its being.'<sup>17</sup> For Schopenhauer, the inaugurator of this school, the suffering in

<sup>17</sup> Plümacher 1888: 124 (my translation). On Plümacher see Beiser 2014: 160, 218–19; Dahlkvist 2007: 37, 222. (Additional note: see also Chapter 7 of this volume.)



existence gives reason to think that non-existence would have been preferable: we ought to lament human existence, and the solution is a recoil away from it into a state of will-less self-negation. It is important that this *ought* is grounded in the nature of the world as such, i.e. the will, which manifests itself in us as the will to life. Schopenhauer insists that the world in itself cannot just exist, but *must* have a moral meaning or significance (*moralische Bedeutung*).<sup>18</sup> Existence for Schopenhauer is therefore decidedly not meaningless:<sup>19</sup> there is a way of interpreting it correctly. And it is called a ‘moral’ meaning, I suggest, because in Schopenhauer’s view the correct interpretation of the world does not just discover naturalistic truths; rather it discovers a would-be normative truth: that the world, and our existence in it, is in itself such that we ought not to want it, indeed such that it ought not to exist.<sup>20</sup>

Schopenhauer is clearly fighting against the optimistic meaning of existence which he thinks theism, and its derivative pantheism, must adopt: the world is such that we have good reason to value it positively—the view summed up in Genesis 1:31, ‘everything was very good [*panta kala lian*]’<sup>21</sup> Schopenhauer’s battle against optimism is in fact a battle for the soul of Christianity. He argues that not theism, but world-rejection, resignation and self-negation are the true heart of Christianity: ‘Do not think for a moment that Christian doctrine is favourable to optimism; on the contrary, in the Gospels, “world” and “evil [*Uebel*]” are used as almost synonymous expressions’;<sup>22</sup> optimism is ‘irreconcilable with Christianity’;<sup>23</sup> its true message is that ‘pain and suffering . . . work towards the true goal [*den wahren Zweck*] of life, the turning of the will away from it.’<sup>24</sup> We learn from this that finding a moral meaning in the world’s suffering need not be the same as *affirming* the world or suffering. Finding a meaning does not necessarily *reconcile* us to the world, and it emphatically does not issue in our finding life *worthwhile*.

In his way Schopenhauer also thinks that suffering is justified, in the sense that we deserve it because of our very ‘act’ of existing as individuated, constitutively desirous beings. The doctrine of original sin contains an allegorical truth for Schopenhauer: ‘Christian doctrine symbolizes *nature*, the *affirmation of the will to life*, using *Adam* . . .; the sin that we inherited from Adam, i.e. our unity with him in the Idea, which is expressed temporally through the

<sup>18</sup> PP2, 183/SW 6: 214–15. This passage is discussed below in the section on *The Birth of Tragedy*.

<sup>19</sup> Readers of Schopenhauer may remember his emphatic message about ordinary human life: ‘how vacuously and meaninglessly . . . life flows away for the vast majority of human beings’ (WWR 1, 348/SW 2: 379)—but the point here is that ordinary human life is caught in the delusory web of individuation and desire, unable to grasp the *metaphysical* truth that existence does have a meaning.

<sup>20</sup> WWR 2, 591–2/SW 3: 661.

<sup>21</sup> PP 2, 271/SW 6: 319 and *passim*.

<sup>22</sup> WWR 1, 352/SW 2: 385.

<sup>23</sup> WWR 2, 600/SW 3: 671.

<sup>24</sup> WWR 2, 651/SW 3: 731.

bond of procreation, causes us all to share in suffering and eternal death.'<sup>25</sup> Our very existence resembles a desire that is worthy of punishment (*strafbar*), says Schopenhauer, and 'every great pain, whether physical or mental, tells us what we deserve.'<sup>26</sup> Suffering is not gratuitous, on this view, it is fitting given our essence as beings of will. In that sense we may say it is justified that we suffer, and there is 'eternal justice' in the world. But then suffering's *being justified* also does not legitimate *affirmation* of the world that contains it: rather, it intensifies the reason for lamenting the world, the evil vale of tears.

So in Schopenhauer's case our existence, with all its suffering, has a 'moral' meaning, and it is fitting for us that we undergo our sufferings. Would this qualify as a 'theodicy'? Some have said so—but this is not obviously right.<sup>27</sup> We have lost not only God, but all reason to affirm the world. The world is by nature such that it *ought not* to be, constitutively such as to forbid any reconciliation with it, and life such that we are in error if we find it worthwhile. A theodicy should at least give meaning in virtue of which life can be affirmed. But here meaning, justification, and affirmation have come apart.

#### 4. *The Birth of Tragedy*: Provocative Formula and Anti-moral Tendency

Nietzsche uses the term 'theodicy' once in *The Birth of Tragedy*, saying that the Apollinian artistic drive 'gave rise to the world of the Olympians in which the Hellenic "Will" held up a transfiguring mirror to itself. Thus gods justify the life of men by living it themselves—the only satisfactory theodicy! Under the bright sunshine of such gods existence is felt to be worth attaining' (BT, 3/KSA 1: 36). Here, however, the term 'theodicy' is almost a play on words. For, as Nietzsche said in writings just prior to *The Birth of Tragedy*, 'a theodicy was never a Hellenic problem; they guarded against attributing the existence of the world and hence the responsibility for its constitution to the gods. "The gods too are subordinate to *anankē* [necessity]"' (KSA 1: 560, my translation).<sup>28</sup> So

<sup>25</sup> WWR 1, 432/SW 2: 479.

<sup>26</sup> WWR 2, 596/SW 3: 666.

<sup>27</sup> Sully (1891: 104) wrote that Schopenhauer 'will have his theodicy, and a curious thing this is'. His remark is echoed by Salter 1911: 291: 'The eternal order does no wrong....[W]e, the world, are responsible for what we suffer in the world. Such, if I may say so, is Schopenhauer's theodicy.' But Rudolf Malter supplies the corrective to this: 'The doctrine of eternal justice does not speak of a good or providential world order, it is at its core an unmasking and an indictment of the sole source of suffering, the will' (Malter 1991: 375, my translation).

<sup>28</sup> Three versions of the same point are extant from 1870: a notebook fragment from early that year (KSA 7: 77) appears lightly revised in both the essays *Die dionysische Weltanschauung* (quoted in the text) and *Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens* (KSA 1: 580).

‘justifying life’ is here used loosely to mean merely ‘enabling the *feeling* that life has a positive value’. It does not mean that life truly has such a value, let alone that there is any reason in ultimate reality for it to be as it is. So this is ‘theodicy’ only in a very thin sense, if at all.

The term ‘theodicy’ does not recur in the rest of the book. But, more to the point, Nietzsche makes the well known pronouncement: ‘only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* are existence and the world eternally *justified*’ (BT, 5/KSA 1: 47). Read carefully, the text presents the world as an aesthetic phenomenon *for* a ‘being’ or ‘essence’ [*Wesen*] that ‘gives itself eternal pleasure’ in spectating our human lives; for *its* gaze we are ‘images and artistic projections’, *it* contemplates us like ‘painted soldiers on a canvas’. This being or essence is also the ‘creator’ and ‘original [or primal] artist’ of the world. The human artist makes art by channelling or merging with the point of view of this creating essence (from which, at the level of ultimate reality beyond the *principium individuationis*, we are presumably not distinct anyway). So the picture here has the approximate shape of a *literal* theodicy after all. The ‘primal artist’, which is perhaps not distinct from the world, is *justified* in—has good reason for—its act of creation, because it can take pleasure in spectating what is created, and us within it, with our sufferings, as a grand artwork. How we are to take this picture is unclear. If the primal artist is supposed to be a true description of reality, then the intention is that existence is justified aesthetically, in the sense that its creation fulfils the purpose of being pleasing from a perspective beyond the human. It would make sense for us to describe that as an aesthetic theodicy. On the other hand, if, as many argue, Nietzsche intended this ‘primal artist’ picture not as true, but rather as a self-conscious myth,<sup>29</sup> then we have at best a ‘false theodicy’,<sup>30</sup> or in a sense none at all, in that nothing really *justifies* existence and the world. Absent any claim that we have good reason to affirm life because of a truth about the way the world is in itself, all it means to say that existence is ‘justified’ through tragedy is that tragedy *enables a positive feeling* toward life, mediated by pleasure in its artistic representation. With Schopenhauer we had justification without affirmation; here, despite Nietzsche’s wording, it seems we may have affirmation without justification.

What was Nietzsche’s later attitude toward this notion of aesthetic justification? Commentators have said that in the ‘Attempt at a Self-Criticism’ of 1886 the formula ‘it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified’ is ‘repeated approvingly’,<sup>31</sup> and that Nietzsche

<sup>29</sup> Gardner 2013: 603–6; Gemes and Sykes 2014: 82–4.

<sup>30</sup> Geuss 1999: 105.

<sup>31</sup> Came 2005: 41.

'congratulates himself'<sup>32</sup> for it. But I do not think the evidence supports these claims. Aside from the fact that in a parallel passage in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche pointedly drops the notion of justification and calls existence simply 'bearable' as an aesthetic phenomenon (GS, 107/KSA 3: 444), the 'Attempt' itself does nothing to uphold these claims of continuity. Nietzsche now calls *The Birth of Tragedy* 'questionable', 'strange', 'inaccessible', 'impossible', 'marked by every defect of youth', 'ponderous', 'sentimental', 'embarrassing', and much else (BT, 'Attempt': 1, 2, 3/KSA 1: 11–14). It could, for all that, be that the key idea—eternally justifying the world as an aesthetic phenomenon—was a good one: but is that what Nietzsche now thinks? His comments are in fact (1) that this formula is 'provocative (*anzüglich*)'; (2) that 'the whole book acknowledges only an artist's meaning (and hidden meaning) behind all that happens—a "god," if you will, but certainly an utterly unscrupulous and amoral artist-god'; (3) that 'one may say that this whole artist's metaphysics [*Artisten-Metaphysik*] is capricious, otiose, fantastical'; but (4) that 'its essential feature is that it already betrays a spirit which will defend itself one day... against the *moral* interpretation and significance of existence [*moralische Ausdeutung und Bedeutsamkeit des Daseins*]' (BT, 'Attempt': 5/KSA 1: 17). It is this latter, anti-moral spirit that Nietzsche congratulates himself for. The capricious and fantastical theodicy, cosmodicy, or whatever it was (call it a 'god' if you will, says Nietzsche, drawing attention to the vagueness of the original idea) is to be left behind. From the perspective of 1886, the best feature of *The Birth of Tragedy* is negative: that it saw no moral meaning in existence. To grasp this we need to look back again to where Nietzsche directs us (this time explicitly), to Schopenhauer.

Nietzsche congratulates himself on the following feature of *The Birth of Tragedy*: 'Here, perhaps for the first time, a pessimism "beyond good and evil" announces itself, here is put into words and formulations that "perversity of mind" [*Perversität der Gesinnung*] which Schopenhauer never tired of bombarding (before it had actually emerged) with his most wrathful imprecations and thunderbolts' (BT, 'Attempt': 5/KSA 1: 17; translation modified). The distinctive phrase 'perversity of mind' (*Perversität der Gesinnung*) pinpoints the following passage in Schopenhauer's *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Volume 2: "That the world has a mere physical but no moral significance [*moralische Bedeutung*] is the greatest, most ruinous and fundamental error, the real *perversity* of the mind [*Perversität der Gesinnung*] and in a basic sense it is certainly that which faith has personified as the antichrist."<sup>33</sup> In confirmation

<sup>32</sup> Tanner 1993: xiii.

<sup>33</sup> PP 2, 183/SW 6: 214–15.

that we have the right text, Nietzsche concludes by saying ‘who can know the true name of the Antichrist?’ (BT, ‘Attempt’: 5/KSA 1: 19). In other words: ‘How best to express the point that the world has no moral meaning?’ *The Birth of Tragedy* looks in retrospect like a first shot at doing so, which didn’t quite hit the mark.

Schopenhauer thinks that unless we believe there is a moral meaning to the world we are falling into a ruinous and fundamental error, leaving us unable to give a metaphysical account of the world, and thereby unable to complete an inescapable task. Schopenhauer holds that both religion and philosophy spring from a ‘metaphysical need’ that is fundamental to, and distinctive of, human beings. ‘[M]ankind absolutely requires an interpretation [*Auslegung*] of life’,<sup>34</sup> which will ‘decipher’ experience and provide an account of what is ‘hidden within or behind’ nature.<sup>35</sup> Unless the world were an end in itself, a *Selbstzweck*—to be which it would have to be perfect and contain no suffering<sup>36</sup>—it must ‘manifest itself as a *means* to a higher purpose [*Mittel zu einem höheren Zweck*]’.<sup>37</sup> Metaphysics is the task of discovering the higher purpose, the hidden meaning behind nature, and it is ducking out of this task that he thinks would be a ruinous error.

For Schopenhauer, as we saw, the hidden meaning is that life ought to be negated. The metaphysical truth, for him, is that the world is an eternally unfulfillable will that manifests itself as multiple suffering individuals, and the world’s being thus gives us reason to negate it. But Nietzsche’s objection to Schopenhauer is not that he was a metaphysical pessimist when he should have been a metaphysical optimist—in other words, that he thought the world in itself was such that we have reason to negate it, when he should have found that we have reason to affirm it. It is not that Schopenhauer found the wrong ‘moral meaning’, the reverse normativity, in the world. Rather, his mistake was to think that the world had *any* such meaning, that there are any such normative truths, one way or the other, about the world in itself. This links with Nietzsche’s view that there is after all no genuine ‘metaphysical need’: ‘The metaphysical need is not the origin of religion, as Schopenhauer has it, but only a *late offshoot* of it. Under the rule of religious ideas, one has got used to the idea of “another world (behind, below, above)” and feels an unpleasant emptiness and deprivation at the annihilation of religious delusions—and from this feeling grows “another world,” but this time only a metaphysical and not a religious one’ (GS, 151/KSA 3: 494). As Nietzsche says later in *The*

<sup>34</sup> PP 2, 293/SW 6: 344.

<sup>35</sup> WWR 2, 192/SW 3: 203.

<sup>36</sup> WWR 2, 592/SW 3: 662.

<sup>37</sup> PP2, 94/SW 6: 108.

*Gay Science*, Schopenhauer abandoned the 'counterfeit' Christian (that is, theistic and optimistic) interpretation of the world, leaving us with the question 'Does existence have any meaning at all?' (GS, 357/KSA 3: 600) But Schopenhauer's answer was Yes, it does have a meaning—and its meaning is that it ought to be negated. This, for Nietzsche, amounts to 'remaining stuck in Christian–ascetic moral perspectives' (GS, 357/KSA 3: 601), not only because it takes the model of self-negation from Christianity, but also because it preserves the assumption that the world must point to some hidden or higher meaning beyond itself—it clings to the essentially religious assumption of a 'metaphysical need'. Nietzsche's point is that we should dispense with that assumption once religious belief is rejected. Then only a historically localized psychological neediness persists, a mere 'unpleasant emptiness'. But the way to react to this emptiness is to embrace Schopenhauer's 'antichrist': the world has no higher or 'moral' meaning.

### 5. Suffering Not Bad in Itself

So where does this leave us with theodicy? God has gone; suffering as such has no agency behind it, and cannot in any obvious sense be justified in a general way. Suffering is not there for a reason, and does not figure in any account of the way things ought to be. There is no overarching truth about the world that gives us reason either to want it or to turn against it. Metaphysical optimism and metaphysical pessimism are abandoned; suffering lacks the meanings that either of these metaphysical positions had assigned it, leaving the world 'beyond good and evil'. But on reaching this point, we are left with a problem. Suffering still *seems* to us, as Nietzsche says, 'an objection to life', (EH, 'Zarathustra', 1/KSA 6: 336); 'evil, hateful, deserving of annihilation . . . a defect of existence', (GS, 338/KSA 3: 567) something to be, if possible, 'abolished' (BGE, 225/KSA 5: 161). The apparent relic of theodicy in Nietzsche's later work is his attempt to persuade us out of these attitudes. In Nietzsche's writings of the 1880s there are many passages such as these: 'Well-being as you understand it—that is no goal . . . . The discipline of suffering . . . has been the sole cause of every enhancement in humanity so far' (BGE, 225/KSA 5: 161); 'We . . . are quite the reverse' of people who 'view suffering itself as something that needs to be abolished' (BGE, 44/KSA 5: 61); 'Are we not, with this tremendous objective of obliterating all the sharp edges of life, well on the way to turning mankind into *sand*?' (D, 174/KSA 3: 155); 'Profound suffering makes you noble' (BGE, 270/KSA 5: 225).

What can possibly be the good of suffering? Rather than giving a single answer, Nietzsche seems to have several different strands going. The notion of an aesthetic appropriation of suffering begun in *The Birth of Tragedy* continues, broadly speaking, in the later writings. There is also Nietzsche's provocative championing of suffering as a spectacle that enhances life through stimulating humanity's sheer unadorned relish in cruelty, coupled with the allegation that we have recently become too soft to acknowledge this fact about ourselves: 'Seeing-suffer feels good, making suffer even more so...without cruelty there is no festival' (GM II: 6/KSA 5: 302). However, neither the case of suffering contemplated through the medium of tragic art, nor that of suffering enjoyed directly as an audience member, can convince us that suffering is anything other than bad for the person who undergoes real suffering. Suffering is by nature something unwanted by the one to whom it occurs, something to which humans are averse. The sufferer surely has reason not to want suffering to occur in his or her life, so how can it not be that life would be better without its sufferings?

One answer to this question explored by recent commentators is that for Nietzsche it is built into human agency that we value challenges to our will, not its mere satisfaction: 'if we value the overcoming of resistance, then we must also value the resistance that is an ingredient of it.'<sup>38</sup> This would be a case where suffering has positive value for the sufferer, assuming that we can call such resistance to one's will suffering. However, the kinds of suffering that have usually called for theodicy are precisely those that are passively undergone, out-of-the-blue afflictions that are in no sense wanted by those they afflict, and these kinds of suffering are not obviously addressed by the thought that suffering is a resistance to the will that has positive value as an ingredient of agency.

However, in *The Gay Science*, Section 338 we find a train of thought that suggests another way in which suffering is not bad for the sufferer:

[S]hould you refuse to let your suffering lie on you even for an hour and instead constantly prevent all possible misfortune ahead of time; should you experience suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, deserving of annihilation, as a defect of existence, then you have besides your religion of pity also another religion in your hearts, and the latter is perhaps the mother of the

<sup>38</sup> Reginster 2006: 177. A related account is that of Katsafanas 2013a, who argues that something like this structure is constitutive of all agency for Nietzsche and can generate substantive normative conclusions. Both Reginster and Katsafanas associate these notions with Nietzsche's concept of will to power.

former—the religion of snug cosiness [*Behaglichkeit*]. Oh, how little do you know of the *happiness* of man, you comfortable and good-natured ones! For happiness and unhappiness are two siblings and twins who either grow up together or—as with you—*remain small* together! (GS, 338/KSA 3: 566–7)

As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>39</sup> in this passage Nietzsche identifies the phenomenon of psychological growth through suffering, akin to what contemporary psychology recognizes as post-traumatic growth.<sup>40</sup> What Nietzsche calls the 'religion of pity' (or compassion) is a moral outlook that classifies every instance of suffering as in itself bad, and therefore as something we have reason to remove or prevent, on pain of diminishing the well-being of the sufferer. Earlier in the same passage Nietzsche objects to the 'religion of pity' that it 'strips the suffering of what is truly personal'; it leaves out of account 'the whole inner sequence and interconnection that spells misfortune for *me* or for *you*! The entire economy of my soul and the balance effected by "misfortune," the breaking open of new springs and needs, the healing of old wounds, the shedding of entire periods of the past' (GS, 338/KSA 3: 566). Understood within an individual's own life-narrative, particular sufferings may (though equally they may not) be an essential part of a whole 'sequence and interconnection' in which the individual gains depth of self-understanding, psychological strength, and new capacities for feeling and action. So one can intelligibly hold that one's life would be impoverished without the suffering it in fact contains. One illustrative case is that of Kay Redfield Jamison, who in answer to the question whether to choose her life again with or without her repeated episodes of bipolar disorder, said, 'Strangely enough I think I would choose to have it . . . . Because I honestly believe that as a result of it I have felt more things, more deeply; had more experiences.'<sup>41</sup> The qualification 'strangely' is understandable here, because the suffering, to be suffering at all, must have been phenomenologically bad and unwanted. Jamison's choice makes sense, though, if phenomenological badness does not correlate with normative badness—that is to say, if something it is awful to experience can also be something we have reason to want in our lives. This appears to coincide with Nietzsche's position here: we have reason to want suffering when it is an essential part of the 'interconnection and sequence' that constitutes psychological growth through suffering.

<sup>39</sup> See Janaway 2016a (now Chapter 12 of this volume).

<sup>40</sup> See Joseph 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Jamison 1997: 218–19. I owe the quotation to Roberts 2008: 745–6. See Janaway 2016a: 18. (Additional note: see Chapter 12 of this volume.)



If Nietzsche is saying that some suffering is simply instrumentally good by virtue of a relation to a state beyond itself, then his view is not terribly controversial. Such an instrumentalist view would even be compatible with the ‘religion of pity’—we could still classify instrumentally good suffering as *in itself bad*, an evil, albeit a necessary one. However, Nietzsche’s view differs from this: rather than thinking of suffering as an evil that may bring some good, he regards it as just *mistaken* to see ‘suffering... as evil, hateful,... a defect of existence’ in the first place. This suggests that we should not see suffering as normatively bad in itself. In that case, Nietzsche opposes the blanket claim that all suffering is in itself something we have reason to wish absent. A kind of growth is necessary for well-being, as Nietzsche understands it; and this kind of growth cannot happen to someone without her first undergoing suffering, and then being able to understand or interpret her suffering in a way that makes it meaningful to her. Hence we must abandon the evaluation of suffering embodied in the ‘religion of pity’, and accept that suffering has no fixed normative value across all contexts—it is not always bad in itself for the sufferer merely because it is suffering. Its value will always depend upon its place in someone’s particular life, on which ‘sequence and interconnection’ it becomes part of.

## 6. Conclusion

Nietzsche is, then, advocating a kind of reconciliation with suffering, a way of affirming life without wishing the suffering away, a way of finding suffering indispensable to us, a way of interpreting it as having a meaning. Such attitudes were said, in our opening quotations, to amount to a kind of theodicy or justification of suffering. But at the very least those descriptions are dispensable in stating this one clear strand in Nietzsche’s position, his identification of a psychological phenomenon that *can*—depending who we are and what happens to us—enrich our lives, and his claim that those who hold that life would be better with no suffering lose sight of this kind of enrichment. We do not need to mention ‘theodicy’ or ‘justification’ to make these points. On the other hand, some thin strand of continuity with theodicy may be thought to remain in the idea that suffering can be welcomed because of meaning it acquires by its standing in relation to some greater whole (now just the individual’s unfolding life).

As mentioned above, Simon May claims that we find in Nietzsche a distinctive notion of affirmation that is more radically discontinuous with

theodicy than this. May sees Nietzsche as in a sense both outside and inside the morality tradition. The aspect that stands outside is a notion of affirmation that does not seek to 'justify' or assign values or meanings to suffering on the basis of its relation to anything beside itself: 'an affirmation of life that is an ungrounded joy in life's "there-ness" or quiddity' and 'that does not invoke a supreme good to which suffering is essential.'<sup>42</sup> This notion of affirmation stands in contrast to the claim made above that Nietzsche finds value in suffering because of its contribution to psychological growth and thereby to well-being. May would count the latter claim—because of its 'because'—as continuous with theodicy. It can be debated whether this notion of ungrounded joy in life's quiddity without the need to relate suffering to any higher values is genuinely Nietzsche's position. May acknowledges that Nietzsche does little to explicate this notion, saying 'we need to do this work for him.'<sup>43</sup> So it remains unclear how much evidence there is that Nietzsche's own view has the precise features May attributes to it.<sup>44</sup> May centres his view on the ideal of *amor fati*; but there is some motivation for the alternative view that *amor fati* should be seen as relying on a strategy of 'hermeneutic theodicy', as Paul Loeb has called it,<sup>45</sup> retrospectively reinterpreting painful events as having been necessary for some good.

The view I have attributed to Nietzsche is also of this latter kind. It says that suffering is not bad in itself for the sufferer, and that a life cleansed of suffering would be incapable of a kind of enrichment necessary for well-being. But it is vital too that on this view suffering has the potential to be either enriching or ruinous. In many lives the 'whole sequence and interconnection' that contains suffering will never be positively reinterpreted, found meaningful, or

<sup>42</sup> May 2011a: 80, 91.

<sup>43</sup> May 2011a: 81.

<sup>44</sup> The evidence may be equivocal. As a gesture in that direction, consider two late notebook passages that contain rare uses of the term *Theodizee*. In one passage Nietzsche writes: '[I]t is a naivety to set up pleasure or intellectuality or morality or any other particularity from the sphere of consciousness as highest value.—This is my chief *objection* to all philosophical—moral cosmo- and theodicies, to all *Whys* and *highest values* in previous philosophy and philosophy of religion. A *kind of means* is *misunderstood as an end*: in reverse, life and its intensification of power has been diminished to a *means*' (KSA 10: 533–4). This passage sits well with May's notion of affirming life in its quiddity without asking for reasons. Nietzsche sets himself against all theodicies or cosmodicies, and says it is mistaken to view life as realizing any value over and above itself. By implication, the suffering that life contains also requires no 'Why?' On the other hand, a note from the same period characterizes 'the pessimism of strength' as follows: 'Now the human being *no longer* needs a "justification of evil", he shudders precisely at "justification": he enjoys evil pure, raw, he finds *meaningless evil* as the most interesting. . . . This *pessimism of strength* also ends with a *theodicy*, i.e. with an absolute Yes-saying to the world, but on the grounds for which people previously said No to it' (KSA 10: 467–8). The notion of being beyond 'justification' looks favourable to May's account of affirmation; however, Nietzsche ends by linking affirmation to the theodicy tradition, and speaks of saying Yes to the world for reasons (*um Gründe*), affirming life *because* of its suffering.

<sup>45</sup> See Loeb 2021.

incorporated into a narrative of growth. And in this respect Nietzsche's mature position lacks some features distinctive of the theodicy tradition. For Nietzsche does not hold that suffering as such has a fixed normative value, that suffering as such has a meaning, that it happens for a reason, or that it is justified, let alone that the world's containing suffering is in line with our interests, or that we ought because of suffering to value our lives one way or another. On Nietzsche's view there is nothing that guarantees meaning or specific normative value to suffering just because it is suffering. In all these senses Nietzsche has moved away from the tradition of theodicy.

# Affect and Cognition in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche

## 1. Introduction

In this chapter I examine two nineteenth-century thinkers who are concerned with the ‘affects and passions’ and who disagree pointedly concerning their influence on cognition. Schopenhauer defends the view that emotions impair cognition, while Nietzsche apparently replies that they are ineliminable from cognition, and that they enhance it. The overall shape of the essay is as follows. Schopenhauer argues that human individuals are naturally disposed to comprehend their environment in affective terms. Affects and passions are for him ‘movements of the will’, and for any human individual, cognition is essentially in the service of the will that constitutes our ineliminable common essence. This is Schopenhauer’s *descriptive* account of the relation between cognition and affective states: as ordinary human individuals we cannot naturally have the one without the other. At the same time, his *evaluative* position concerning this relation is negative: cognition is spoiled, warped, or tainted by its inability to shake off the emotions, desires, or drives that belong to human nature. Hence we have an instance of the characteristically pessimistic pattern that permeates Schopenhauer’s thought. What we are by nature, what we are in essence, is something we would be better not being. Cognition proper would be *objective*, in the sense that it would mirror the world purely, with no intervening influence from the needs, desires, interests, or feelings of the individual. But, alas, human individuals are not cut out for cognition proper, unless one of two extraordinary things happens, propelling the human individual away from his or her human nature into a state in which, as Schopenhauer says, he or she ‘becomes pure subject of cognition’. This can occur in aesthetic experience, a rare oasis of peace in which all willing abates temporarily, and which Schopenhauer explicitly claims is a cognitively superior state. It can also occur in the total self-negation of the will to life in the face of suffering, the extreme state that he regards as the necessary condition of ‘true salvation, redemption from life and from suffering’ (WWR 1, 424/SW 2:

470). But in the absence of these two relatively abnormal cases, ordinary empirical cognition is doomed to be the slave of will and affect, and hence imperfect.

Nietzsche, I suggest, accepts something analogous to Schopenhauer's descriptive position on the relation between cognition and the affects. For Nietzsche the self is a complex of drives and it is primarily these drives and their associated affects that interpret the world.<sup>1</sup> But he firmly rejects Schopenhauer's evaluative stance. He denies the possibility of a pure, objective, affect-free cognition, and identifies the philosophical aspiration towards such a form of cognition as a target for criticism. Further, he seeks to use the descriptive account of the relation between cognition and the affects to give an undermining explanation, a genealogical explanation, of this aspiration. The would-be 'pure' cognition is merely theoretical, it is a myth, but the drives and affects of the theorizer can, thinks Nietzsche, explain why the myth has been so compelling for philosophers, and most notably for Schopenhauer. Secondly, Nietzsche argues for a reversal of Schopenhauer's evaluative stance: that is to say, he seeks to reveal the influence of the affects on human cognition not only as necessary, but as beneficial. Cognition is improved by affect, and by multiplying affects. This is a key point in Nietzsche's so-called perspectivism, or, as I have previously argued,<sup>2</sup> this really is what he means with the famous statement, 'There is . . . only a perspectival "knowing"; and *the more* affects we allow to speak about a matter . . . that much more complete will our "concept" of this matter, our "objectivity" be' (GM III: 12/KSA 5: 365).

How could Nietzsche so much as think that affects can be cognitively beneficial? In the final part I consider some objections along these lines. In dealing with such objections, it is important to free ourselves of certain assumptions which may be thought to characterize 'traditional epistemology'. In one recent account, given by the editors of a volume on epistemology and emotion, 'emotions did not play a significant role in traditional epistemology and if they were paid any attention at all, they were mainly thought of as impairing cognition.'<sup>3</sup> This conception, they continue, can be characterized in the following terms: a concentration on context of justification rather than context of discovery, a fixation upon propositional knowledge, and an assumption that knowledge requires infallible foundations.<sup>4</sup> If, for example, the dominant question for epistemology concerns how a belief that *p* is justified, and justified in such a way as to ensure certainty, then emotional

<sup>1</sup> See BGE, 6, 12/KSA 5: 20, 27; WLN pp. 96, 139.

<sup>2</sup> Janaway 2007: 202–16.

<sup>3</sup> Brun and Kuenzle 2008: 1.

<sup>4</sup> See Brun and Kuenzle: 3–4.

or affective responses, which are variable, subjective, and fallible, can seem at best irrelevant, at worst detrimental to the task of understanding the nature of knowledge. Similarly, under this 'traditional assumption' little attention may be paid to the many roles that emotions or affects may play in motivating, guiding and enabling the *activities* of seeking and gaining knowledge. Examples of the latter are the doubt and disappointment that may spark investigation, the satisfaction of discovery (Moritz Schlick's 'sense of fulfilment' or 'joy in knowledge... the exaltation of having guessed correctly'<sup>5</sup>), the ability to focus attention on objects that emotions make salient, and, perhaps more contentiously, the discerning of features of an environment that are themselves response-dependent (e.g. 'Seeing the utterly specific ways in which a situation, animal or person is *appealing* or *repellent*'<sup>6</sup>).

Neither Schopenhauer nor Nietzsche can be regarded as adherents of 'traditional epistemology' in the sense we have outlined. When Nietzsche speaks of what we often translate as 'knowledge' or 'knowing' (*Erkenntnis*, *Erkennen*), or of 'we knowers' (*wir Erkennenden*<sup>7</sup>), he tends to have in mind a complex and protracted *project of investigation* for someone whose concern is, for example, the value of morality:

Whoever sticks here... and *learns* to ask questions here, will fare as I have fared:—an immense new vista opens up to him, a possibility takes hold of him like a dizziness, every sort of mistrust, suspicion, fear springs forth, the belief in morality, in all morality totters... [W]e need a *critique* of moral values... and for this we need a knowledge [*Kenntnis*] of the conditions and circumstances out of which they have grown, under which they have developed and shifted,... knowledge of a kind that neither existed up until now nor even been desired. (GM, Preface, 6/KSA 5: 253)

Nietzsche, I shall argue, claims that the affects are necessary to 'knowing'. That claim can seem implausible if we relate it to the narrow concerns of 'traditional epistemology'. But, I shall contend, it becomes a more plausible and interesting claim if we focus on the kind of cognitive enterprise Nietzsche is predominantly concerned with.

Schopenhauer, to whom Nietzsche expressly responds, recognizes propositional knowledge as a distinctive form of cognition: within *Erkenntnis* ('cognition') he discerns a subspecies, which he calls *Wissen* ('knowledge' or

<sup>5</sup> Schlick 1971: 382. (Cited in Brun and Kuenzle 2008: 2).

<sup>6</sup> Johnston 2001: 181.

<sup>7</sup> As at GM, Preface: 1/KSA 5: 247.

‘knowing’).<sup>8</sup> While all animals have some form of cognition, *Wissen* depends on the ability to form concepts and is possessed only by human beings. It amounts to propositional knowledge which is adequately justified either by relation to further propositions or direct perception.<sup>9</sup> However, the species of affect-free cognition that Schopenhauer privileges is wholly different from this. It is exemplified by the aesthetic experience in which conceptual thought is an abeyance, and in which

we devote the entire power of our mind to intuition [*Anschauung*] ... we lose ourselves in the object completely, and continue to exist only as pure subject, the clear mirror of the object ... [T]hen what we thus cognize is no longer the individual thing, but rather the *Idea*, the eternal Form.

(WWR 1, 201/SW 2: 210)

In Schopenhauer’s conception, eliminating affects enables a superior cognitive encounter with a timelessly existing reality. He goes even further in the same direction when discussing the kind of cognition or knowledge that characterizes the morally good, compassionate person. This is a kind of knowledge which he finds prefigured in the Upaniṣads and Neo-Platonism: ‘the same knowledge that makes up the essence of all true mysticism’, a state in which someone ‘recognizes [*erkennt*] his own essence in itself in someone else’s appearance’ (BM, 255/SW 4: 273).

Finally, a word on the range of affective states that our two thinkers recognize. For both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche *Affekt* (affect) is readily coupled with *Leidenschaft* (passion) and encompasses but is not exhausted by what we tend to call emotions. For Schopenhauer all instances of affect are categorized as movements of the will. ‘Willing’ (*Wollen*) is an immensely comprehensive notion for him, which explicitly includes

all desiring, striving, wishing, longing, yearning, hoping, loving, enjoying, rejoicing and the like, no less than not-willing or resisting, and detesting, fleeing, fearing, being angry, hating, grieving, suffering pain, in short all affects and passions [*Affekte und Leidenschaften*]. For these affects and passions are simply movements, more or less weak or strong, now violent and stormy, now gentle and calm, of one’s own will that is either restrained or released, satisfied or unsatisfied, and they all relate in multiple variations to the attainment or non-attainment of what is willed, and to enduring or

<sup>8</sup> See WWR 1, 57–76/SW 2: 41–60; and Janaway 2014b.

<sup>9</sup> See FR, 100–4/SW 4: 105–10.

overcoming what is detested; thus they are decided affections of the same will that is in operation in decisions and actions. (FW, 38/SW 4: 11)

It seems that for Nietzsche too all affects are at bottom inclinations or aversions, or some kind of positive and negative stirrings of the will. He talks at times simply of 'inclinations and aversions', 'pro and contra' or 'for and against'. But the range of affects is even more extensive for him. In the *Genealogy* and *Beyond Good and Evil* alone Nietzsche applies the term *Affekt* to all of the following: anger, fear, love, hatred, hope, envy, revenge, lust, jealousy, irascibility, exuberance, calmness, self-satisfaction, self-humiliation, self-crucifixion, power-lust, greed, suspicion, malice, cruelty, contempt, despair, triumph, feeling of looking down on, feeling of a superior glance towards others, desire to justify oneself in the eyes of others, demand for respect, feelings of laziness, feeling of a command, and brooding over bad deeds.<sup>10</sup> So when we inquire about the relation of cognition to affects, we have to deal with a broad range of felt states with some positive or negative tone.

## 2. Schopenhauer: Cognition Naturally Influenced by Affects

Schopenhauer presents a strong and rounded conception of what is natural to any living being—namely willing: striving towards ends, individual self-affirmation, and striving towards living and reproducing life. Will to life, in his phrase, is the essence of a human being; he or she is an individual expression of will to life. Much can be unfolded out of this essence for Schopenhauer. Individual living beings are active by nature: they strive for ends and do so insatiably. Their striving frequently fails of fulfilment, and that guarantees suffering. Life is a perpetual flux of striving, suffering, temporary satiation and more striving, located in a body, a living organism, which is akin in essence to the whole of nature. The human being is not the rational intellect or immaterial soul of some dominant parts of the philosophical tradition. Schopenhauer, by contrast, seeks to translate the human being back into nature—to use Nietzsche's well-known phrase (BGE, 230/KSA 5: 169). Human beings naturally affirm the will to life, or, as Schopenhauer declares we might as well say, affirm the body. It is because willing is the primary

<sup>10</sup> See Janaway 2007: 205–6. Sources are BGE, 19, 23, 187, 192, 260/KSA 5: 32, 38, 107, 113, 211; GM I, 10, 13; GM II, 11; GM III, 15, 20/KSA 5: 271, 280; 310; 374–5, 388.



characteristic of human beings that emotion-related cognition belongs to our natural condition.

When it comes to our ordinary cognition of the world we find it permeated by will, and the panoply of affective states that fall under the category of 'willing'. Here are some samples from *The World as Will and Representation*:

Cognition in general, rational as well as merely intuitive, proceeds originally from the will itself and . . . [is] a mere mechanism, a means for the preservation of the individual and the species as much as any organ of the body. Originally in the service of the will and determined by the accomplishment of its aim, cognition remains almost entirely in its service throughout: this is the case in all animals and in almost all human beings.

(WWR 1, 177/SW 2: 181)

When directly intuiting the world and life, we usually consider things only in their relations . . . . We look, for instance, at houses, ships, machines and such with the thought of their purpose and their suitability for that purpose. We look at human beings with the thought of their relation to us, if they have one; next we look at them with the thought of their relation to each other . . . . People are usually and for the most part given over to this type of consideration: in fact, I think most people are entirely incapable of any other sort.

(WWR 2, 389/SW 3: 425–6)

Here are some of his examples (some of them liable to cause offence) of the way things are perceived with an inescapable affective aspect:

[E]ven an inanimate thing that is nevertheless supposed to be the instrument to some event that is hateful to us seems to bear a hideous physiognomy: the scaffold, for instance, or the fortress to which we are consigned, the surgeon's instrument case, the travelling coach of our loved one, etc., indeed, numbers, letters, and seals can grimace at us horribly and affect us like terrible monsters. By contrast, the things that grant our wishes suddenly look pleasant and amiable, such as the hunchbacked old woman with our love letter, the Jew with the *louis-d'ors*, the rope-ladder for our escape . . . . [And this effect] is there at a lower level in those objects that possess only a distant relation to our will, i.e. to our inclination or disinclination [*Neigung oder Abneigung*]. (WWR 2, 390/SW 3: 426–7)

Still, natural and common though this effect apparently is, Schopenhauer regards it as spoiling and falsifying cognition.

To see that a purely objective and therefore correct grasp of things is possible only when we regard them without any personal interest, and thus in the complete silence of the will, imagine how much every affect [*Affekt*] or passion [*Leidenschaft*] tarnishes and falsifies cognition; in fact, every inclination or disinclination [*Neigung oder Abneigung*] deforms, colours, and distorts not only our judgement, no, but even our original intuition of things.

(WWR 2, 390/SW 3: 426)

[the intellect] can perform its function purely and properly only so long as the will pauses and is silent; by contrast, every noticeable excitation of the will disturbs the functioning of the intellect and falsifies its results by its interference. (WWR 2, 227/SW 3: 241)

Schopenhauer gives numerous examples of such interference, citing a range of emotions: 'A great *fright* often scares us out of our senses to such an extent that we become petrified or do the most inappropriate thing'; 'When we are *angry*, we no longer know what we are doing, still less what we are saying'; '*Fear* stops us from seeing and taking hold of any means of rescue that might be nearby, or even close at hand'; '*Love* and *hate* corrupt our judgement completely: we see nothing but faults in our enemies and merit in our loved ones, whose very flaws seem amiable to us' (all from WWR 2, 227–9/SW 3: 241–4). Hope provides an interesting case: it 'magnifies its object', making what we want appear 'probable and close at hand':

but the intellect must thereby do violence to its own nature, which is directed to truth, inasmuch as it forces itself, in contravention of its own laws, to treat as true things that are neither true, nor probable, and are often barely possible, all in order briefly to appease, pacify and put to sleep for a while the unruly and ungovernable *will*. Here we see clearly who is the master and who the servant. (WWR 2, 228/SW 3: 243)

There is an apparent peculiarity here. On the one hand the intellect is a mere instrument towards the will's ends; on the other hand the intellect's peculiar function, aiming at truth, is hindered by the very will to which it is the servant. However, there is, I suppose, no contradiction in Schopenhauer's position. The *origin* of intellect is explained by its fulfilling ends for the organism; but not all the ends of the organism are best served by the intellect's fulfilling its peculiar function to the optimum degree. It is intelligible to think that we may not always live best by grasping reality with the least degree of intervention

from the affects and passions. But Schopenhauer's point is that the intellect would do better at attaining the ends peculiar to it without its subjection to the will's mastery.

Schopenhauer also anticipates Freud's notion of repression, as Freud himself noted.<sup>11</sup> The will can assert its hegemony over the intellect, Schopenhauer says,

when the will forbids the intellect certain representations, when it simply blocks certain trains of thought, because it knows (i.e. it has learned from the very same intellect) that they will arouse in it one of the emotions described above. The will then reins in the intellect and forces it to focus on other things. (WWR 2, 219/SW 3: 233)

Note that the more primitive will has the power of absolutely preventing certain trains of thought from arising in the intellect. That is to say, although such thoughts are in some sense present as ours, we never consciously entertain them. The process of prevention must therefore be an unconscious one. Schopenhauer gives many examples from everyday life—the sort of thing that ‘any attentive person can observe...in himself’ (WWR 2, 222/SW 3: 235)—in which the will makes decisions or plans as it were ‘in secret’, decisions from which the intellect remains excluded and ‘can only learn of them through eavesdropping and taking the will by surprise, as would be the case with a stranger; and must catch the will unawares while it is acting on its decisions simply to find out its true intent’ (WWR 2, 220/SW 3: 234). A conscious judgement as to the desirability or undesirability of acting thus—and-so is swept away ‘to my own astonishment’ by a ‘jubilant and irrepressible joy’ (WWR 2, 220/SW 3: 234) that reveals the true orientation of my underlying will. But Schopenhauer in general regrets that matters are thus—the will has a ‘direct, unconscious, and *detrimental* influence...on cognition (WWR 2, 231/SW 3: 245; my emphasis).

### 3. Pure Cognition

What, then of the other term in the contrast that Schopenhauer makes between cognition as servant of will, and those rarer states of cognition in which it becomes purified of willing? To grasp the depth of this contrast we

<sup>11</sup> See Janaway 2010: 142–3 (now Chapter 1 of this volume).

have to look at the dialectical shape of Schopenhauer's philosophy as a whole. *The World as Will and Representation* presents a struggle between the natural, embodied, willing self and the pure, non-individuated subject: a tension that is there from the start, and remains till the end. 'Subject' is introduced on the first page of the book, and immediately in §2 we encounter this:

The *subject* is the seat of all cognition but is itself not cognized by anything. . . . We all find ourselves as this subject, although only in so far as we have cognition of things, not in so far as we are objects of cognition. But the body is already an object among objects . . . [I]t is situated within the forms of all cognition, in space and time (by means of which there is multiplicity). The subject, on the other hand, having cognition, but never cognized, is not situated within these forms. (WWR 1, 25/SW 2: 5–6)

The body that each of us experiences as our own is an object in space and time. But the subject is not an item in the world. We 'find ourselves as' the subject in whose consciousness all objects are present, but this subject cannot itself be conceived as existing among the objects. So 'subject' does not mean the same for Schopenhauer as 'person' or 'human individual'. These latter terms refer to items in the world of objects. As person or embodied human individual each of us is in and of the world, something existing as an object among objects. But we are not simply individuals, for Schopenhauer, because we each find ourselves as subject—though not (note) as *subjects*, because 'subject' is not a count noun.

Behind Schopenhauer's picture of the subject lies a familiar Kantian thought about the 'I' of self-consciousness: 'I cannot cognize as object itself that which I must presuppose in order to cognize an object at all.'<sup>12</sup> The awareness one has of oneself as a centre of consciousness is not sufficient to identify the self that one finds oneself as with any object, body, person, or individual thing in the world. In that case, there will potentially be a genuine tension in our sense of self for Schopenhauer to exploit. Our sense of self may shift according to whether we view ourselves as naturally embodied human individual or as pure subject. *The World as Will and Representation* can be seen as structured around this opposition, with different forms of self-identification becoming available to us as our sense of self shifts from one pole to another. As active, willing beings our consciousness is that of a bodily individual, but in aesthetic

<sup>12</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, A402. Schopenhauer compares his view to Kant's at WWR 2, 290/SW 3: 314.

experience, as Schopenhauer conceives it, we become the ‘pure, will-less, painless, timeless *subject of cognition*’ (WWR 1, 201/SW2: 210–11), and he thinks that, if the will within us negates itself, we reach a redemptive state of consciousness in which we do not regard ourselves as individuated, separated from everything else, at all.

When Schopenhauer calls this state of consciousness (like that of aesthetic contemplation) a state of ‘peace’ or ‘rest’ (*Ruhe*), the crucial point he is urging upon us is that the subject feels no affect or passion, because consciousness is void of willing. He describes the will-less aesthetic state as one in which ‘happiness and unhappiness disappear’ (WWR 1, 221/SW 2: 233); and the same must apply to the supposed saintly state in which the will to life negates itself—except that happiness and unhappiness must constantly threaten to intrude because the human essence, will to life, can only be dissociated from consciousness, though not, of course (being an *essence*), lost altogether. Schopenhauer conceives of this pure, will-less cognition as objective precisely because it escapes the influence of the individual human being’s desires and affects. The purely cognitive subject is ‘incapable...of willing or affect in general [*überhaupt keines Wollens oder Affektes*]’ (WWR 2, 514/SW 3: 571), and so can become an indifferent, detached spectator, which ‘cannot participate or take interest [*Antheil oder Interesse nehmen*] in anything’ (WWR 2, 515/SW 3: 572). Schopenhauer takes this indifference or disinterestedness to be sufficient for objectivity.

#### 4. Nietzsche: No Affect-Free Knowing

Nietzsche’s most potent response to Schopenhauer comes in one of his most famous and most discussed passages, *Genealogy* III, 12 (which is often considered the definitive published text that presents Nietzsche’s ‘perspectivism’). When Nietzsche announces that ‘there is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival “knowing”’, he is opposing the conception of ‘objectivity’ championed by Schopenhauer in his aesthetic theory, the objectivity allegedly attained by a ‘pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge’ (or again ‘cognition’). In Schopenhauer’s view, as we saw, ordinary consciousness is in thrall to the will, with its host of ‘passions and affects’, which are constantly ebbing and flowing pro- and con-attitudes, or movements of the will; but in the consciousness of the artistic genius, and to a lesser extent in all of us, a purer kind of cognition is attainable, according to Schopenhauer, in which all affects and passions are switched off or suspended and the subject

comes as close as it can to being a passive mirror of what is objectively there. In *Genealogy* III, 12 Nietzsche takes this account of 'objectivity' beyond its aesthetic context, and portrays it as emblematic of a wider temptation for philosophers, that of positing an ideal cognitive state in which we may attain true knowledge, unpolluted by emotions, desires, and personal or bodily attachments.

The passage reaches its climax as follows:

Finally let us, particularly as knowers, not be ungrateful toward such resolute reversals of the familiar perspectives and valuations with which the spirit has raged against itself all too long now, apparently wantonly and futilely: to see differently in this way for once, to *want* to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future 'objectivity'—the latter understood not as 'disinterested contemplation [*interesselose Anschauung*]' (which is a non-concept and absurdity), but as the capacity to have one's pro and contra *in one's power*, and to shift them in and out: so that one knows how to make precisely the *difference* in perspectives and affective interpretations useful for knowledge. For let us guard ourselves better from now on, gentlemen philosophers, against the dangerous old conceptual fabrication that posited a 'pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge [cognition]'; let us guard ourselves against the tentacles of such contradictory concepts as 'pure reason', 'absolute spirituality', 'knowledge in itself': here it is always demanded that we think an eye that cannot possibly be thought, an eye that must not have any direction, in which the active and interpretive forces through which seeing first becomes seeing-something, are to be shut off, are to be absent; thus what is demanded here is always an absurdity and non-concept of an eye. There is *only* a perspectival seeing, only a perspectival 'knowing'; and *the more* affects we allow to speak about a matter, *the more* eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear on one and the same matter, that much more complete will our 'concept' of this matter, our 'objectivity' be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to disconnect the affects one and all, supposing that we were capable of this—what? would that not be to *castrate* the intellect? . . .

(GM III: 12/KSA 5: 364–5)

Nietzsche doesn't always 'do argument', but here there is one:

- (1) all cognition is active interpretation rather than passive reception of data
- (2) all active interpretation is in the service of the will
- so (3) all cognition is in the service of the will.

So the idea of a cognition wholly free of the will, of positive and negative motivation, and of all affect, is the idea of something impossible. But the assumptions of this argument are Schopenhauer's own. And if we restrict ourselves to Schopenhauer's conception of *empirical* cognition, ordinary cognition that an individual human being with an unreformed consciousness can attain, Schopenhauer will agree that such cognition is always in the service of the will.

Nietzsche then turns Schopenhauer against himself, by explaining Schopenhauer's positing of a will-less objective cognition as itself driven by hidden affects of Schopenhauer's own—despair over the life of willing, torment from his own desires, hope of redemption from ordinary existence. The very idea of a will-less cognition here gives evidence, in other words, of a particular 'will' at work. When Nietzsche, at the end of the same essay, famously diagnoses a 'will to nothingness' as lying behind the all-pervading ascetic ideal, Schopenhauerian ideas are again to the fore. The very expression 'will to nothingness' is a verbal play on 'will to life'. And Schopenhauer is clearly among those targeted here:

this hatred of the human, still more of the animal, still more of the material, this abhorrence of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and of beauty, this longing away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wish, longing itself—all of this means—let us dare to grasp this—a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is and remains a *will*!

(GM III, 28/KSA 5: 412)

If we are still thinking of Schopenhauer when we reach this culmination in the diagnosis of the ascetic ideal (as I think we must), then we should note the Schopenhauerian pattern being turned against Schopenhauer. The explanations Nietzsche hints at for Schopenhauer's ascetic theorizing of disinterested aesthetic objectivity and the negation of will all cite affective states: hatred, abhorrence, fear, aversion, longing, will. He diagnoses a longing to escape from longing, a will to will-lessness. Nietzsche's view elsewhere is that philosophers in general 'take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and through and made properly abstract—and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact' (BGE, 5/KSA 5: 19). Schopenhauer's theory of an altered sense of self in which one enters a state of pure cognition, and identifies oneself with an arena of consciousness purged of all affect (other than the blissfulness of not having to feel affects) is constructed in the service of a will or wish whose aversions

and longings shape his attempts to understand reality. But that is just what we would expect according to Schopenhauer's own theory of the primacy of the will and its dominant influence over cognition. In other words, Nietzsche seeks to undermine Schopenhauer's theorizing about affect-free cognition by applying a version of Schopenhauer's own theory that affects and passions are always liable to drive our conceptual thinking.

### 5. Perspectivism, Affects, and Nietzsche's Cognitive Enterprise

Beyond claiming that Schopenhauer's ideal of pure cognition is a myth, what does Nietzsche mean when he says 'There is... only a perspectival "knowing"'? And what does he mean when he says '*the more* affects we allow to speak about a matter... that much more complete will our "concept" of this matter, our "objectivity" be'? He is not only at odds with Schopenhauer, but would appear to call for a reassessment of any view that regards the affects as merely liable to impair cognition. But precisely what that reassessment should involve is a matter of some dispute. In a previous discussion,<sup>13</sup> I offered the following interpretation of the chief claims contained in this part of Nietzsche's text:

- (1) that there is only knowledge that is guided or facilitated by our feelings,
- (2) that the more different feelings we allow to guide our knowledge, the better our knowledge will be.

However, this reading has been subjected to a number of objections. First, that in the relevant passage Nietzsche need not be read as primarily concerned with proposing a general thesis about knowledge, a view put forward by Ken Gemes:

we should think of perspectivism primarily as... the injunction to let as many drives as possible be expressed.... Schopenhauer is clearly not simply describing knowledge as involving the quieting of the will, what Nietzsche in GM derides as 'the passions cooled', but is actually thereby advocating a withdrawal from the world of passions and more generally willing. By interpreting perspectivism not primarily as a thesis about the nature of

<sup>13</sup> Janaway 2007: 206.



knowledge and objectivity but as a normative injunction to a certain ideal of health we more directly connect with the issue of primary importance to Nietzsche.<sup>14</sup>

We can agree that Nietzsche's attack on Schopenhauer's conception of 'pure knowledge' is part of his wider campaign against the unhealthy 'ascetic ideal'—indeed we have said so above—and that the unhealthiness Nietzsche is concerned with is a matter of some debilitation of our drives. But the injunction in the perspectivism passage is addressed specifically to *philosophers*. And it is plausible to think that if we are to identify a healthy, life-affirming way of being a philosopher, we will require a revised conception of the philosopher's characteristic enterprise of 'knowing', as Nietzsche explicitly states. Drives are in action when we do philosophy, for Nietzsche. He characterizes the philosopher in terms of a particular complex of drives: 'his doubting drive, his negating drive, his wait-and-see ("ephectic") drive, his analytical drive, his exploring, searching, venturing drive, his comparing, balancing drive' (GM III: 9/KSA 5: 357). Elsewhere he says of the philosopher that 'the order of rank [in which] the innermost drives of his nature stand to one another' constitutes 'who he is' and that all the 'basic drives', rather than any fundamental 'drive for knowledge', have practised philosophy (BGE, 6/KSA 5: 20). Philosophy is a way of giving expression to one's drives. Hence one way of giving healthy expression to one's drives may well be to philosophize in a healthy way. But a precondition for attaining that healthy way of approaching the philosopher's activity is, as Nietzsche says, to resist the yearning for the mythical state of 'pure', affect-free cognition. That Nietzsche issues the injunction that Gemes identifies is therefore compatible with his proposing a claim about knowledge.

Paul Katsafanas<sup>15</sup> takes issue with claim (2) on two grounds: (a) that the text does not license the idea that knowing is 'better' the more feelings one brings to bear on the object of knowledge; (b) for anyone to make such a claim would be 'incredible'. (The two points are independent, unless one believes Nietzsche could not have claimed something incredible, a belief it would be hard to justify.) How we should read the text may in the end hinge on nuance and impression, as much in Nietzsche's writings does. But it looks as though, having warned philosophers against the conception of 'knowing' as a wholly disinterested, affect-free state, Nietzsche next gives them a *reason* to avoid that conception. The reason is that 'knowing' is more complete with more affects, less complete with fewer affects, so to think of a knower from whom *all* affect

<sup>14</sup> Gemes 2009a: 106–7.

<sup>15</sup> Katsafanas 2013c: 557–8.

is absent is to think of someone who succeeds less as a 'knower'. To succeed less as a knower is to be worse as a knower, and so to have more affects brought to bear on the object of one's knowledge is to be better as a knower. The text at least bears that construal without undue distortion.

If we find (2) an odd thing to say, we should at least consider whether it is an odd thing for *Nietzsche* to be saying. And, to the contrary, we find that it harmonizes with a number of utterances he makes elsewhere. For example, he insists that for his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to be properly intelligible to an interpreter, he or she must have been 'at sometime deeply wounded and at sometime deeply delighted by each of its words' (GM, Preface: 8/KSA 5:255). Again he pronounces that

'Selflessness' has no value in heaven or on earth; all great problems demand *great* love . . . . It makes the most telling difference whether a thinker has a personal relationship to his problems and finds in them his destiny, his distress, and his greatest happiness, or an 'impersonal' one, meaning he is only able to touch and grasp them with the antennae of cold, curious thought. In the latter case nothing will come of it, that much can be promised. (GS, 345/KSA 3: 577–8)

It is undeniable here that the 'cold' and 'impersonal' approach is one that seeks to eliminate affects (love, distress, happiness), and that Nietzsche proclaims it an unfruitful approach to the thinker's task.

So Nietzsche's texts at least lend some credence to his making claim (2). Is it in itself a credible claim, though? Katsafanas confronts the claim with the following example:

I am serving on a jury and must assess the case against an individual charged with murder. Following . . . claim (2), I attempt to cultivate feelings of rage, indignation, sympathy, desire for revenge, desire for forgiveness, and so forth. Is this emotional tangle really going to help me to adjudicate the merits of the case, weigh the evidence, and achieve 'better' knowledge of the arguments on each side? That seems incredible.<sup>16</sup>

But, in reply, how relevant is such an example to Nietzsche? Nietzsche is concerned with enhancing knowledge by bringing multiple affects to bear on 'one and the same matter [*Sache*]', but we should pause to ask what that might

<sup>16</sup> Katsafanas 2013c: 557.

embrace. It is unlikely that he means 'one and the same proposition'. So his claim is unlikely to be that I have better knowledge of whether X murdered Y, the more affects I bring to bear on that question. In his *Genealogy*, as we saw, Nietzsche is seeking knowledge of *moral values*—'a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances out of which they have grown, under which they have shifted and developed... knowledge of a kind that has neither existed up until now nor even been desired' (GM, Preface: 6/KSA 5: 253). This kind of 'knowing' is an investigative project that for Nietzsche must involve the investigator in doubt, insecurity, anxiety and distress. If Nietzsche's question is how a philosopher should best go about the task of exploring, analysing, understanding, and reacting to the pervasive and complex aspect of human life that is 'morality', repeatedly challenging his or her own secure preconceptions and values in the process, then to take 'knowing' as if it meant satisfying conditions for having knowledge of a single proposition—what we earlier saw referred to as the concern of 'traditional epistemology'—is clearly misplaced.

Gemes provides another objection: that both (1) and (2) are either trivial causal claims or implausible constitutive claims, neither of which Nietzsche is likely to be making. Here is Gemes again:

The worry with the causal reading is that this may be seen as a fairly banal reading of the alleged affect-dependence of knowledge according to which what affects we have will, to some degree, determine the knowledge we have. For instance, one whose affects are aroused by cricket is more likely to have knowledge of Bradman's test average than one who has no affects aroused by cricket. The claim that the more affects we have the more knowledge we (are likely to) have has the implication, for instance, that one whose only affects concerning London are wholly focused on London's tourist attractions is likely to have less knowledge of London than one who has an affective response to multiple facets of London (tourist attractions, history, politics, transport network, etc). All this makes perspectivism a fairly trivial thesis.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps these are 'trivial' claims. But even if they are, it should not need stating that we cannot infer from their triviality to the conclusion that Nietzsche does not make them. And if we are afraid of diminishing Nietzsche's contribution here, we should reflect that in the dialectical context in which he is working, arguing against an opponent who holds the theory that 'every affect or passion obscures and falsifies knowledge', it would serve Nietzsche well to advert to

<sup>17</sup> Gemes 2009a: 105.

some uncontroversial truths that conflict with the opponent's view. Therefore there is no obvious reason to conclude that Nietzsche does not advance the kinds of causal claim Gemes cites.

The example of 'knowledge of London' provides a much better model for understanding Nietzsche's concerns than 'knowing whether X murdered Y'. The former is a complex, varied and potentially inexhaustible kind of knowledge, which cannot be assimilated to the weighing of evidence for believing a single proposition, or even a conjunction of propositions. And it seems plausible to say that multiplying affects plays a role in this kind of knowledge. To elaborate the example, the more I can enjoy springtime in a central London square, feel at home in some parts and uneasy in others, confident about how to traverse the city but frustrated by the bus service, disappointed by some of the changes in architecture, excited by the choice of music performances, admiring of the cultural diversity and tolerance, envious of the super-rich, sympathetic to beggars, but also apprehensive and annoyed about their presence on the streets, and so on, the better I know the city. Nietzsche's project of gaining 'knowledge' about the origins and value of morality is more plausibly analogous to our example of progressively coming to know London than it is to someone's weighing evidence for believing that X murdered Y.

The other horn of Gemes' dilemma was that if Nietzsche claims not merely a causal, but a constitutive connection between cognition and affect, then he says something implausible. The textual evidence for Nietzsche's making a constitutive claim of this kind is admittedly far from conclusive. He states that a cognizing mind that is not actively interpretative is 'an absurdity and non-concept [*ein Widersinn und Unbegriff*]'. That could be interpreted as saying that it would be contradictory to think of such a mind. And since the only forms of active interpretation mentioned explicitly in the context are 'affective interpretations [*Affekt-Interpretationen*]', we may think that what is contradictory is the conception of a cognitive mind that does not make affective interpretations; in other words, that making affective interpretations is constitutive of a cognizing mind. This is perhaps to labour the text. But if Nietzsche did mean this, would it be so implausible a claim? On the one hand, it might be that the kind of strenuous investigative project of 'knowing' that a *Nietzschean philosopher* would undertake has 'great love', 'deep delight', 'suspicion', and 'fear' as ineliminable components—that you could not engage your intellectual conscience and probe deeply enough into your philosophical prejudices unless you underwent such emotions in the process. Nietzsche straightforwardly says as much about the ideal 'Nietzschean knower'. But one might also argue that even more sober, non-Nietzschean processes of

investigation in search of knowledge belong to a type of activity of which some affects—feeling uncertain, feeling disappointed, feeling confident, empowered or satisfied—are constitutive. Similar ideas can be found among Nietzsche's pragmatist contemporaries. William James writes that 'the transition from a state of puzzle and perplexity to rational comprehension is full of lively relief and pleasure',<sup>18</sup> and Peirce that 'Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief'.<sup>19</sup> A case might be made for saying that the process of human investigation—the sort of activity engaged in by all *Erkennenden*—essentially involves affects at various stages. If so, then it will be only from within a narrow 'traditional epistemological' assumption about the relation of affects to cognition (which may anyway turn out to be a rather recent orthodoxy) that it can so automatically seem odd that Nietzsche takes the view he appears to in his remarks about perspectival 'knowing'.

## 6. Conclusion

To see the import of the point at issue between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche—whether affects spoil or enhance knowledge or cognition—we must beware of imposing on either thinker a particular epistemological paradigm, which we have here labelled that of 'traditional epistemology'. Neither philosopher is principally seeking an analysis of 'S knows that p'. Schopenhauer thinks of *Erkenntnis* in a broadly Platonic manner as a cognitive state of mind in which the subject achieves some degree of access to reality. In this model, access to reality is increased by the absence of subjective desires and affects, but also by the replacement of conceptual thought by a higher form of intuitive insight. For Nietzsche, *Erkennen* is primarily an activity, a protracted and demanding search for knowledge and understanding of a novel kind. One thing that Schopenhauer and Nietzsche have in common, as we have seen, is the belief that affective states play a pervasive role in guiding and shaping human cognition as they conceive it. Schopenhauer combines this view with the claim that cognition is consequently imperfect, and for him there is also the potential for a 'pure' cognitive access to reality, which tends towards objectivity precisely to the extent that affective states of the subject are in abeyance. Nietzsche criticizes Schopenhauer's position by making the following claims: (a) there is no possibility of a 'pure', objective, affect-free cognition, (b)

<sup>18</sup> James 1897: 63.

<sup>19</sup> Pierce 1992: 114. For further discussion see Hookway 2002.

cognition is not rendered imperfect through its being guided and shaped by affects, and (c) the belief that there is an absolutely 'pure' objective form of cognition is itself an instance of theoretical thinking's being motivated by underlying affective states, such as a longing to be free of desires, a hatred of the human, or an aversion to life. This third critical point shows that for Nietzsche it is possible to *go wrong* because one's understanding is driven by affects. Engagement of the affects is not sufficient for gaining knowledge. But in his view, cognition is improved not by eliminating affects, which he holds to be impossible, but rather by opening oneself to a wider range of differing affects. Nietzsche's position can seem hyperbolic, as when he suggests that the activity of inquiry can succeed only in the presence of great love, highest elation, and deepest despair. Nonetheless, we have suggested that, when thinking of cognition or 'knowing' as an investigative activity, we should recognize it as having typical affective contours, such as a transition from calmness into doubt and dissatisfaction, and from these states into the joy of discovery. But in particular it is arguable that the kind of self-critical investigative activity Nietzsche envisages, his opening up of 'immense new vistas', in which all one's previous attitudes towards morality must be called into question, could not be undertaken effectively by someone who was not prepared to experience and confront some anxieties and ambivalences of feeling. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he suggests that somebody who 'considers even the affects of hatred, envy, greed, and power-lust as the conditioning affects of life . . . will suffer from such a train of thought as if from sea-sickness' and will enter a realm of 'dangerous knowledge' (BGE, 23/KSA 5: 38). Such knowledge as this, at any rate, is not to be gained, in Nietzsche's view, without undergoing deeply unsettling feelings.

PART IV  
NIETZSCHE

*Suffering, Affirmation, and Art*

# Beauty is False, Truth Ugly

## Nietzsche on Art and Life

### 1. Art, Insight, and Illusion

In John Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' the poet contemplates and idealizes an ancient piece of pottery that speaks the famous words 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty.' A few short quotations from Nietzsche may cast some light on my title, suggesting as they do Nietzsche's wholehearted disagreement with the urn's message:

What means do we have for making things beautiful, attractive and desirable when they are not? And in themselves I think they never are!.

(GS, 299/KSA 3: 538)

Truth is ugly: *we possess art* lest we perish of the truth.<sup>1</sup>

Art, in which precisely the *lie* hallows itself, in which *the will to deception* has good conscience on its side. (GM III: 25/KSA 5: 402)

These passages, written in mid- or late career, give the clear impression that for Nietzsche art is the production of beauty that deceives, and that truth is not only ugly, but so ugly that we could not live without obliterating it by falsifications of some kind. In *The Gay Science* he also writes:

*Honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide. But now our honesty has a counterforce that helps us avoid such consequences: art, as the *good* will to appearance. . . . As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* to us, and art furnishes us with the eye and hand and above all the good conscience to be *able* to make such a phenomenon of ourselves. (GS, 107/KSA 3: 464)

<sup>1</sup> Note from 1888, KSA 13: 500.



Here, as in the much-discussed passage in the same book about ‘giving style to one’s character’ (GS, 290/KSA 3: 530–1), Nietzsche invites us to take the falsifying, distorting, and beautifying that occurs in the activity by which an artist produces an art work and transpose it to the case of the self: we are the ‘artists’ who make a falsifying ‘work’ out of the raw material that is also ourselves—and without such falsification of ourselves by ourselves, it seems, existence could neither be borne nor even continued. But if we are to learn this from art proper, art proper must also be concerned essentially with making false appearances.

In a recent book Bernard Reginster contrasts the later phase of Nietzsche’s career with his position in the earlier work *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which

Nietzsche has not yet developed the doctrine of will to power and has only the illusions of art to prescribe as an antidote for those who have ‘looked boldly into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and [are] in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will,’ that is to say, those who have achieved ‘Dionysian wisdom’ (BT 7). Tragic wisdom, at that early stage, thus prescribes eschewing the Dionysian depths and remaining at the Apollonian surface with its beautiful appearances—being, in other words, ‘superficial—out of profundity’.

(GS, Preface 4)

In his later works, by contrast, tragic wisdom ceases to be (partly) Apollonian and becomes a fully Dionysian wisdom. The affirmation of life no longer requires that we avoid what *The Birth of Tragedy* characterizes as the ‘insight into the horrible truth’ of our condition (BT 7). We are now capable of contemplating this truth without being driven to nihilistic despair by it because the revaluation made possible by the doctrine of the will to power actually enables us to welcome and affirm it. (Reginster 2006: 248–9)

Reginster is using this contrast with *The Birth of Tragedy* primarily to portray and make plausible a central element in the later Nietzsche’s position, which can be described—in a brief sketch—as follows. Will to power is to be the new criterion of value in human life, and if we understand will to power rightly, we see that many things that we tend to evaluate in strongly negative terms must instead be valued positively. Coming to see this is, for Reginster, what Nietzsche means by revaluing values. Thus:

if... we take power—the overcoming of resistance—to be a value, then we can see easily how it can be the principle behind a revaluation of suffering.

Indeed, if we value the overcoming of resistance, then we must also value the resistance that is an ingredient of it. Since suffering is defined by resistance, we must also value suffering. (Reginster 2006: 177)

In Reginster's illuminating account, will to power has a paradoxical structure: in willing some end, we will to overcome obstacles or hindrances that stand in our way; but that implies that in some sense we will to encounter hindrances. What we will is not straightforward satisfaction or pleasure, but the existence of obstacles for our willing to test itself against and overcome, and this has the consequence that 'its satisfaction brings about its own dissatisfaction . . . it is a kind of desire that does not allow for *permanent* (once-and-for-all) satisfaction' (247). However, rather than finding in this a reason for despair, as Schopenhauer does, Nietzsche urges that to find value in the very '*activity* of confronting and overcoming resistance' without that activity's reaching any ultimate resting place where desire ceases, is to have discovered a 'new happiness'.<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche associates this attitude with Dionysus, and, Reginster suggests, 'the distinctive characteristics of Dionysus' life are the characteristics of the *creative life*' (242). If one comes to value this creative life, there are certain implications for what else one values. Valuing creativity implies a positive evaluation of suffering, of loss, of impermanence (or becoming), and of one's own ultimate personal failure.<sup>3</sup>

Reginster articulates an important and central strand in Nietzsche's later thought about value in human life, and for present purposes I shall not question what he says about the will to power and its role in revaluing values. But before contrasting Nietzsche's later views with those of *The Birth of Tragedy*, we should probe in more detail the statement that his earlier view 'has only the illusions of art to prescribe as an antidote for . . . those who have achieved "Dionysian wisdom"'.<sup>4</sup> I shall argue that if we separate out the tragic artist from the purely Apollonian artist and from the Socratic 'theoretical man' whose particular preoccupations allegedly gained hegemony over art at a later stage, we shall find a triangle of different attitudes to truth, from which it will emerge that tragic art in particular is not limited to superficial or beautifying illusion. This is not a new thought, as Michael Tanner, for one, has written that 'Beauty, in Nietzsche's early view, is both an intimation of the horror of life

<sup>2</sup> Reginster 2006: 247, citing GS, Preface, 3.

<sup>3</sup> See Reginster 2006: 243–8.

<sup>4</sup> Having read Reginster's 'Art and Affirmation' (Reginster 2014), I am pleased to find a good measure of agreement between his detailed reading of *The Birth of Tragedy* and mine.

and a consolation for it... Art, at its greatest, tells the truth and makes it possible to bear it' (Tanner 1993: xxix).

## 2. Truth and Illusion in Apollonian Art

The premise that provides the framework for the whole of *The Birth of Tragedy* is that Apollo and Dionysus stand for two contrasting creative forces that exist in nature, in the psychology of artists and their audiences, and in cultural movements, trends, and periods. Nietzsche uses a swarm of different expressions to characterize art that is driven by the Apollonian (or Apolline)<sup>5</sup> creative force, and there can be no very precise way of summing it up. But especially important notions seem to be 'dream', 'image', 'illusion', 'beauty', 'form', and 'individuation'. Although Nietzsche begins by associating Apollo with the visual arts, and speaks of sculptural images of the Olympian gods as its pinnacle, he finds the purest poetic manifestation of the Apollonian in the Homeric epics. In his heroes, but especially in his gods, Homer portrays glorious individuals of overwhelming beauty, prowess, and resistance to death, enabling us to delight in the surface texture of what is, for Nietzsche, a dream-world:

*Homer... is related to that Apolline folk culture as the individual dream artist is related to the dream faculties of the people and of nature in general. The Homeric naïveté can only be understood as the complete triumph of Apolline illusion... Amongst the Greeks the 'will' wished to contemplate itself, in the transfiguration of genius and the world of art; in order to glorify themselves, its creations had to feel themselves worthy of glorification; they had to see themselves in a higher sphere... It was in this sphere of beauty that they saw reflections of themselves, the Olympians.*

(BT, 3/KSA 1: 37–8)

Nietzsche is also clear about what gave the Greeks reason to relish the beauty of this illusory realm of great individuals, to indulge in such a dream-world from which they would rather not wake up. They were motivated by a 'tremendous need', namely that of requiring a 'justification for the life of man'; to fulfil this need their artistic talent battled with their 'talent... for

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche's word is *apollinisch*: the Whiteside translation renders this as 'Apolline', which I retain (along with 'Dionysiac') in quotations.

suffering and the wisdom of suffering'<sup>6</sup> and overcame it. To see why creating the image-world of the Olympian gods was a triumph, we must therefore see what it was a triumph over—and Nietzsche presents this more plainly than anything else in his book, in the passage on the folk tale of the daemon Silenus, whose voice proclaims:

Miserable, ephemeral race, children of hazard and hardship, why do you force me to say what it would be much more fruitful for you not to hear? The best of all things is something entirely outside your grasp: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second-best thing for you—is to die soon.

(BT, 3/KSA 1: 35)

The Greeks must believe this pronouncement to be true, or at least to be plausible or a part of the truth, since otherwise it would not give rise to the need, the battle, or the victory that Apollonian art provided them with. Nietzsche confirms that the Greek 'knew and felt the fears and horrors of existence'. The relation of Apollonian artistic illusion to the truth the Greeks thus recognized is described as follows: they veiled or concealed the truth with illusion, they 'had to interpose the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians between themselves and those horrors'. The reason for this action, and the outcome of it, is that this 'artistic *middle world*'—a screen between themselves and reality—enabled the Greeks to regard human existence as justified. Existence had no value and could not be affirmed in reality, but in a substitute dream-reality, made sufficiently radiant and engaging, it could.

Thus the statement above from Reginster about 'remaining at the surface with its beautiful appearances' seems to apply particularly well to Apollonian art. Yet even here, as we have said, the creator, audience and wider culture of Apollonian art must have had *some access to the truth* they triumph over. A culture or individual who was not tormented to any degree by the knowledge or feeling of the horrors of existence would feel no 'ardent longing for illusion and for redemption by illusion' (BT, 4/KSA 1: 38): they might enjoy illusion for other reasons, but unless some intimation of the horrors of existence, such as they are, exerted a force somewhere upon the psyche, the incentive behind Apollonian art would have disappeared. The relation between the façade and the force that motivates it must be a matter of some speculation. Nietzsche does nothing to locate this activity of 'veiling' or 'interposing' anywhere concrete. It is really no use asking whether it occurs

<sup>6</sup> These quotations and all others in this paragraph are from BT, 3/KSA 1: 34–8.

in the mind of the individual poet or audience member, in the communal enactment of a public recitation, or in the general outlook of a whole culture whose members habitually learn and repeat the poems—these are not questions to which we should expect precise answers. However, alternative methods of ‘veiling’ or ‘concealing’ seem to be: (1) that one participates in a deliberate pretence or make-believe that the truth is other than it is; (2) that one practises a kind of self-distraction, occupying the mind with something fictional so that it gives little or no thought to the truth; (3) that one engages in some form of self-deception and successfully conceals the truth from oneself; (4) that one undergoes something like a repression outside of one’s own conscious control, and becomes unaware of the truth and of one’s need to veil it, though still under its influence. In all these cases—even the last—mere lack of awareness of the horrors of existence is not what is required. Thus even at the height of Apollonian artistic dream-world creation, there cannot be sheer ignorance of the horrible truth. Art is here driven by some original, pre-artistic awareness of truth, and gains its point by blunting or wholly disarming the effect of that truth upon the psyche.

### 3. Tragic Art and Truth

However, Greek culture moves beyond this predominantly Apollonian stage. The familiar central claim of *The Birth of Tragedy* is that tragedy, the highest art form, combines the genius of both Apollo and Dionysus.<sup>7</sup> The most down-to-earth and unequivocal contrast between Apollo and Dionysus lies in their linkage with the different formal parts of Attic tragedy, the dialogue and chorus respectively. In the dialogue we have once more a represented world, the images of individuals, clearly drawn, distinct and splendid—larger than life. But the chorus is non-individuating and non-representational. Born out of music and communal movement, and stating its lyrical message always through these media, its essence is not to present images. It originates, according to Nietzsche, in the wild intoxication of ecstatic group revelry, and stands for a loss of the sense of individuality, for the individual’s merging with a joyful release into something greater. It is this non-imagistic, anti-individual, primordially musical element that characterizes the Dionysian in art.

Now, what Nietzsche describes in section 7 of *The Birth of Tragedy*—full of obscurity though it is—is a state in which a knowledge of truth has been

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., the beginning of BT, 5/KSA 1: 42.

attained, but where Apollonian illusion no longer suffices as a means for surviving it. The Dionysian man, says Nietzsche, resembles Hamlet: 'both have truly seen to the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge* [*erkannt*] ... true knowledge [*wahre Erkenntniss*], insight into the terrible truth outweighs every motive for action, for Hamlet and Dionysiac man alike' (BT, 7/KSA 1: 56–7).<sup>8</sup> For the Hamlet-like Dionysian man this knowledge cannot be banished from his consciousness, or lied away by purely Apollonian means:

Now no comfort avails any more; longing transcends a world after death, even the gods; existence is negated along with its glittering reflection in the gods or in an immortal beyond. Conscious of the truth he has once seen, man now sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence; ... now he comes to know the wisdom of the sylvan god, Silenus: it nauseates him.

(BT, 7/KSA 1: 57)<sup>9</sup>

So when Nietzsche follows this up by saying that art approaches as 'a redeeming, healing enchantress. She alone can turn these nauseous thoughts at the horror or absurdity of existence into ideas compatible with life',<sup>10</sup> he cannot mean Apollonian art. Apollonian art provided comfort, but comfort no longer avails. Apollonian art created the glittering reflection of the gods, but that too is now negated along with the world. Apollonian art protected its adherents from nausea at the truth because it prevented them from properly coming to know it: but what about those who have become properly acquainted with that truth so that it sticks resolutely in their consciousness and nauseates? It is the Dionysian element in tragedy that Nietzsche leans upon at the end of this passage: 'The satyr chorus of the dithyramb is the salvation of Greek art.'

Tragedy provides what Nietzsche now calls a 'metaphysical consolation', namely 'that whatever superficial changes may occur, life is at bottom indestructibly powerful and joyful' (BT, 7/KSA 1: 56). Nietzsche's description of the way tragedy does this is diffused through the pages of sections 7–10. Hard though the description is to grasp, a vital central thought is that tragedy enables one to *live with* the truth by confronting it in an affirmative frame of mind, not to live *in spite of* the truth by veiling it over. Tragic art can 'turn these nauseous thoughts at the horror and absurdity of existence into ideas that one can live with' (BT, 7/KSA 1: 57)—where the verb *umbiegen*, to turn

<sup>8</sup> Whiteside's translation slightly modified.

<sup>9</sup> Here, exceptionally, I use Kaufmann's translation (in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967)), slightly modified.

<sup>10</sup> BT, 7/KSA 1: 57, Whiteside's translation slightly modified.

around, bend or divert, seems a significantly different metaphor from that of veiling or interposing.<sup>11</sup> In the latter case, horrific thoughts are blocked out and something beautiful put in their place. Now, in tragedy, the thoughts remain in consciousness but are encountered differently and put to a different use. The Dionysian effect of tragedy is its alleged ability to dissolve the sense of individuality and merge the participant or spectator into a 'primal oneness' or 'primal being' (*das Ur-Eine* or *Ursein*). From the consciousness that characterizes this wider standpoint it is possible to rejoice in the destructiveness of life towards the individual. But for this to occur it must be the case that, in addition to being absorbed into the non-individuated state, one has before one the representation of the individual in whose destruction one rejoices—whence the unique power of the union between Apollonian image and Dionysian intoxication:

we must see Greek tragedy as the Dionysiac chorus, continuously discharging itself in an Apolline world of images... this primal ground of tragedy radiates that vision of the drama which is entirely a dream phenomenon and thus epic in nature, but on the other hand, as the objectification of a Dionysiac state, it is not Apolline redemption through illusion, but rather a representation of the fragmentation of the individual and his unification with primal being. Thus the drama is the Apolline symbol of Dionysiac knowledge and Dionysiac effects, and consequently separated from the epic as by a tremendous chasm. (BT, 8/KSA 1: 62)

Tragedy, then, uses the beautiful imagery of the grand individual character, not as a means by which to escape from or veil the horrific truth of life, but to serve in full view as the symbolic victim of life's true horrors, now seen in an extraordinarily heightened mood from a viewpoint in which one can rejoice at life's very merciless destruction.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In an earlier version of this passage in the essay 'Die dionysische Weltanschauung' (1870) Nietzsche uses the verb *umwandeln*, to transform ('transform these nauseous thoughts... into ideas one can live with'). He uses *umbiegen* (KSA 1: 567) a few sentences earlier, saying that through tragic art the Hellenic will operated to 'turn around that mood of negation again' (*jene verneinende Stimmung wieder umzubiegen*, KSA 1: 566, my translation).

<sup>12</sup> In 'Die dionysische Weltanschauung' Nietzsche gives (perhaps clearer) emphasis to the notion of the *symbol*, which he distinguishes from *truth*. The art that unites Dionysus and Apollo is 'a veiling of the truth which though more transparent than beauty, is still a veiling [*Umschleierung*]' the Dionysian human being here 'goes beyond beauty and yet does not seek truth. He stays suspended in the middle between the two. He strives not for beautiful illusion, but yet for illusion [*Schein*], not for truth [*Wahrheit*], but for *verisimilitude* [*Wahrscheinlichkeit*]. (Symbol. Sign of truth)' (KSA 1: 567). Still, this form of art 'rested on a view of gods and world different from the older view of beautiful illusion'. Tragedy stands symbolically for the horrific truth. Apollonian art shuns truth in favour of false beauty.

So does the early Nietzsche prescribe the illusions of art as the only antidote for those who have looked boldly into the terrible destructiveness of world history and the cruelty of nature? Yes and No. Tragic art incorporates illusion in its character portrayal and scenes of dialogue, and without that illusion it could not function; but it is emphatically not Apollonian ‘redemption through illusion’—rather an Apollonian *Versinnlichung*, or making sensible, of Dionysian *Erkenntnisse*, Dionysian insights, cognitions, knowledge. Thus it is not from the use of illusion alone that tragedy gains its value. It gains it rather from the combination of illusion and an emotional involvement in a deeper unity that happily consigns the symbolic individual human life to oblivion, and so enables its audience to reach a cognitive awareness of a terrible truth—at least about life’s suffering, loss, impermanence, and failure—and leaves them in a position to embrace that truth.

#### 4. Art, Truth, and Socratism

The idea that tragedy is concerned with knowledge or recognition of truth might seem odd given the contrast Nietzsche draws between tragedy and the force of Socratism, which is not only opposed to tragedy and uncomprehending of it, but brings about its death. Socrates is the ‘prototype of *theoretical man*’ who delights in the process of uncovering truth, ‘who in his faith in the explicability of the nature of things, attributes the power of a panacea to knowledge and science, and sees error as the embodiment of evil’ (BT, 15/KSA 1: 98–100). If tragedy does what we have said it does, how could truth-obsessed Socrates be the fatal opposite of the tragic poet?

In Nietzsche’s critique of Socratism we may see an early version of what became his call to question the will to truth in the *Genealogy of Morality* (GM III: 23–27/KSA 5: 395–411). There, in the passage we cited above, Nietzsche sets art against the will to truth: ‘art, in which precisely the *lie* hallows itself, in which the *will to deception* has good conscience on its side, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than is science’ (GM III: 25/KSA 5: 402). Nietzsche seems to invite reminiscence of his earlier discussion of Socrates, and of the aesthetic Socratism that allegedly transformed Greek art for the worse, when he typifies the antagonism of art and ascetic ideal as ‘Plato *contra* Homer’, and laments that an artist’s subservience to the ascetic ideal is the truest corruption of the artist there can be. Nietzsche speaks here as though uncovering truth were in itself something antithetical to art. But we need not assume that there is only one way to encounter the truth. Socrates, as



portrayed in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is wedded to explanation, rational grounding, theory, and dialectic—‘to be beautiful everything must first be intelligible’ (BT, 12/KSA 1: 85). When unaffected by Socratism, tragedy was a potent collaboration between dream-image and delighted dissolution of individuality, which combined intuition (*Anschauung*) and ecstasy (*Entzückung*); art infused by Socratism is a counterfeit of this which replaces intuition with conceptual thoughts (*Gedanken*), and ecstasy with mere ‘affects’ (*Affecte*; see BT, 12/KSA 1: 84). Socratism’s mission is to subordinate both image and intoxication to the *rational*. So once Socratism takes hold and becomes entrenched, we (as its heirs) are prone to assume that argument and explanation are the sole or primary means to access truth. But when it was uninfected by Socratism, the story goes, tragedy enabled a uniquely powerful *aesthetic* confrontation with truth. Before the over-concern for rational explanation became dominant in Greek culture, participants in tragedy could be brought to a Dionysian form of cognition (*Erkenntniss*), an encounter with truth made sensible through the beautiful image.

When the later Nietzsche recommends that ‘the value of truth is for once to be experimentally *called into question*’ (GM III: 24/KSA 5: 401) it is fairly clear that his target is a particular manner in which truth is valued, the ‘overestimation of truth... belief in the *inassessability*, the *uncriticizability* of truth’ (GM III: 25/KSA 5: 402), the idea that seeking and being in possession of the truth in the ways that science privileges, is something whose value is unconditional.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, to call the value of truth into question experimentally is not to say that we must be content *solely* with illusions, or that there is *no* value in pursuing truth. Rather, it opens up the thought that turning away from the Socratic rational examination of life, and embarking upon works of artistic illusion, fiction, imagination, or dreams may sometimes be necessary in the service of life. But even if one lies with a good conscience, it does not prevent one from believing in and wanting at least some of the truth.

## 5. Art and Truth in the Later Nietzsche

What, then, can we find in the way of continuities and discontinuities between Nietzsche’s earlier and later views of the relation between art and truth? In later writings Nietzsche abandons the crypto-Schopenhauerian relic of ‘*das*

<sup>13</sup> See Janaway 2007: 229–39.

*Ur-Eine*' and, as he says in his 1886 Preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, he can now regard the book's whole 'artist's metaphysic' as 'arbitrary, idle and fantastic' (BT, 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism', 5/KSA 1: 17). But what has essentially altered as regards the question of art's relation to truth? Superficially at least, the picture of art as an essentially untruthful and deceiving activity pervades the rhetoric of the later writings. A plethora of passages in *The Gay Science*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, the *Genealogy*, and *Twilight of the Idols* present the role of art and artists variously as that of lying, simplifying, glorifying, selecting, rounding out, hiding and reinterpreting the ugly, seeing things from a distance, round a corner, cut out of context, distorted, through coloured glass, or covered with not fully transparent skin, telling tall tales, playing tricks, taking pleasure in life only by falsifying its image, showing us falsehood with a good conscience, and helping us embrace the good will to illusion, the cult of the untrue, the cult of surface, the transformation of things so that they mirror one's power, the will to invert the truth, the will to deception, and the will to untruth at any price.<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche rejoices in art's not seeing things for what they *are*, that latter being, he says 'anti-artistic' (TI, 'Expeditions', 7/KSA 6: 115–16). It should be noted once again that Nietzsche's preoccupation in many of these passages is not with art as such, but with learning from artists how to interpret and value oneself: we wish to be wiser than artists, he says, 'For usually in their case this delicate power stops where art ends and life begins: *we*, however, want to be poets of our lives, starting with the smallest and most commonplace details' (GS, 299/KSA 3: 538). But, as we said above, if what we learn from poets comprises all these forms of lying and distorting, surely that can only be because poets as such, in their art, lie and distort. Even if Nietzsche is questioning or ambivalent about the value of seeking truth, he need not be indecisive as to whether art functions as truth-teller or falsifier. From the many passages cited above, it looks on the surface of it as if art tends consistently towards the opposite of truth-telling in the period we are discussing: if it is truth you want, do not go to art, but if something other than truth is valued, art may be uniquely placed to help.

However, I want to suggest that remaining at this surface alone may miss some subtleties to be found in Nietzsche's position. For one thing, 'perishing from the truth' is an alternative to 'Not facing the truth'; but it is equally opposed to 'Facing the truth and not perishing from it'. So that late note 'Truth

<sup>14</sup> See GS, 85, 107, 290, 299, 361/KSA 3: 442, 464, 530, 538, 608; BGE, 59, 192/KSA 5: 78, 114; GM III: 25/KSA 5: 402; TI, 'Expeditions', 9/KSA 6: 117–18.

is ugly: *we possess art lest we perish of the truth*' could be read with an Apollonian or a tragic inflection, or perhaps both. An apprehension of the ugly may be something we must shield ourselves from by a compensating illusion; it may also be something which we can be enabled to tolerate and even rejoice in. In the last year of his creative life Nietzsche wrote some words, destined for publication in two works, that convey something of what he was trying to say about the tragic experience from the start:

Saying Yes to life in its strangest and hardest problems; the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the tragic poet...to be oneself the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity—that joy which includes even joy in destroying. (TI, 'What I Owe to the Ancients', 5/KSA 6: 160)<sup>15</sup>

The point of 'Saying Yes to life in its strangest and hardest problems' seems to be the acceptance of the kind of truth that, with Reginster, we saw involved in a revaluation of values—the truth that because of the nature of will to power, suffering, loss, impermanence, and failure must be encompassed within what we value in life—and Nietzsche is still prepared to link this insight with the psychology of the tragic *poet*. So a tension persists between art as comforting deception and art as medium for a joyous confrontation with terrible truth.

Prominent concerns in *The Gay Science* of 1882 are the intellectual conscience and the virtue of honesty. Alongside them are the repeated recommendations to look to the activities of artists to learn creative attitudes towards oneself. Aaron Ridley finds these preoccupations unified in the following way:

The artist's 'intellectual conscience', which insists on honesty, drives him—once he has honestly recognized the character of his and our most fundamental needs—to cultivate and value the false, but to do so to the minimum extent necessary to ward off 'nausea and suicide'...The creative spirit envisaged in *The Gay Science* is...one who, first, faces the truth as honestly as possible; second, tries to see as beautiful as much as possible of 'what is

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche also quotes this passage again in EH, 'The Birth of Tragedy', 3/KSA 6: 312. Note the lexical reversion to the Schopenhauerian 'will to life', and the past tense in 'what I called', 'what I guessed'. There is some retrieval of *The Birth of Tragedy* at work in these late passages.

necessary in things' [see GS, 276/KSA 3: 521] ... and then, finally, falsifies those conditions that defeat this attempt—that is, turns 'existence' into an 'aesthetic phenomenon'—to the least possible degree consistent with making life 'bearable'. (Ridley 2007: 82–4)

On this reading, when Nietzsche talks of art as a counterforce to honesty, he has in mind not a total or permanent self-deception or screening off of the truth, but instead a subtle finessing of the truth, as in his comments that 'we do not always keep our eyes from rounding off, from finishing off the poem; ... At times we need to have a rest from ourselves by looking at and down at ourselves and, from an artistic distance, laughing *at [over]* ourselves or crying *at [over]* ourselves' (GS, 107/KSA 3: 464). Thus, for Ridley: 'it is a condition of the kind of creativity that Nietzsche is interested in that one first face the truth, and only then embark upon one's (modest) falsifications and rounding off of it' (2007: 83). One needs to falsify to some degree—and to which degree is a test of the limits of one's 'strength', as Nietzsche says in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

so that the strength of a spirit would be proportionate to how much of the 'truth' he could withstand—or, to put it more clearly, to what extent he needs it to be thinned out, veiled over, sweetened up, dumbed down, or lied about.

(BGE, 39/KSA 5: 57)

But on this reading the ideal towards which art provides a helping hand is that of facing up to the truth of life as honestly as one can. Art's falsifications are no self-subsistent exercise in escaping from truth, but rather an employment of illusion in the service of the intellectual conscience, with its project of confronting the truth—a change of tactic when all other means take us to the limit of what we can bear.

Such an amicable settlement between the values of truth-telling and of producing illusions displays a Nietzsche apparently comfortable with himself. However, I think that for that very reason we should question Ridley's reading. Elsewhere Nietzsche paints the value of truth as poignantly troubling and problematic, as in 'what meaning would *our* entire being have if not this, that in us this will to truth has come to a consciousness of itself *as a problem*?' (GM III: 27/KSA 5: 410), and this remark from his notebooks: 'About the relation of art to truth I became serious at the earliest time: and even now I stand before this dichotomy [*Zwiespalt*] with a holy terror' (KSA 13: 500). Nietzsche is troubled, rather than settled, about the possibility of reconciling art with truth. And the unease increases with some of his later additions to *The Gay Science*,

in Book Five and the second edition Preface, which, as we shall see, raise more radical questions about the very nature of truth and the value of our pursuing it.

## 6. Unease about the Nature and Value of Truth

Nietzsche manifests ambivalence about the desirability of seeking truth at all, in or out of art. Disturbed by the idea of truth posited as an unconditionally valuable goal before which we must sacrifice our personal interests and, in a sense, ourselves—truth ‘posited as being, as God, as highest authority’, along with ‘a certain *impoverishment of life*’ (GM III: 24–5/KSA 5: 401–3)—Nietzsche does not recommend ceasing to value truth, but merely calling the value of truth into question experimentally. Why? The answer is in his question ‘What meaning would *our* entire being have if not this, that in us this will to truth has come to a consciousness of itself *as a problem*?’ (GM III: 27/KSA 5: 410). By the time of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche is where he is, he is what he is, as an investigator into the value of our values, because he has been guided by a commitment to truthfulness. But he has come along the way to recognize this as a distinctly moral commitment, as the ‘Christian truthfulness’ that has undermined the belief in God, and is in the process of undermining morality.<sup>16</sup> At the same time the questionable status of truthfulness as a value keeps resurfacing throughout his work:

We do not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment; this is perhaps where our new language will sound most foreign. The question is how far the judgment promotes and preserves life, how well it preserves, and perhaps even cultivates, the type...To acknowledge untruth as a condition of life: this clearly means resisting the usual value feelings in a dangerous manner. (BGE, 4/KSA 5: 18)

So there are other values that can trump those of seeking and holding true beliefs. Yet at times, Nietzsche envisages an ideal that seems to involve apprehending as much truth as one can about life: ‘the ideal of the most high-spirited, vital, world-affirming individual, who has learned not just to accept and go along with what was and is, but who wants it again and again

<sup>16</sup> See also GS, 344/KSA 3: 574–7.

*just as it was and is through all eternity*’ (BGE, 56/KSA 5: 75), or someone who does not want ‘anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity, still less to conceal it . . . , but to love it . . . ’ (EH, ‘Why I am so clever’, 10/KSA 6: 297). In a similar vein is the most famous passage (GS, 341/KSA 3: 570) in which he imagines someone becoming so well disposed to themselves and to life that they would rejoice at the prospect of that life’s endlessly recurring. In these places the ideal appears to be that of a tragic wisdom in which the horrors can be seen for what they are and borne with exceptional strength, even assigned a positive value. This appears to involve confronting life truthfully, loving or saying yes to a life that is unalterably what it is, not blurring, concealing or falsifying it into an illusory version that one can like or affirm. But then again, also in *The Gay Science*, the one thing that ‘is needful’ is ‘that a human being should attain satisfaction with himself—be it through this or that poetry or art’ (GS, 290/KSA 3: 531). Nietzsche is after an attitude of positive self-evaluation, but seems unsettled as to whether the form it should take is that of fictionalizing or confronting the truth about oneself.<sup>17</sup> His ‘holy terror’ [*Entsetzen*] before the dichotomy ‘art and truth’<sup>18</sup> may be evidence that his own attitude here is dichotomous.

Section 344 of *The Gay Science* contains an important argument that illuminates Nietzsche’s later concerns about what he calls ‘science’. Here is how Nietzsche poses the problem:

We see that science, too, rests on a faith; there is simply no ‘presupposition-less’ science. The question whether *truth* is necessary must get an answer in advance, the answer ‘yes’, and moreover this answer must be so firm that it takes the form of the statement, the belief, the conviction: ‘*Nothing is more necessary than truth*; and in relation to it, everything else has only secondary value.’ This unconditional will to truth—what is it?

Science (including the historical, interpretive disciplines practised by Nietzsche himself) not only seeks truth, but bases itself on a prior conviction or faith that seeking and attaining truth has a value that is not conditional upon anything else. ‘Will to truth’, as Nietzsche explains by paraphrase later in the section, is an attitude of desiring ‘truth at any price’. So Nietzsche wants to know the nature of this demand that enquiry makes upon itself. Is it

<sup>17</sup> On the tension between self-affirmation and aesthetic self-satisfaction, see Janaway 2007: 254–64.

<sup>18</sup> KSA 13: 500 (my translation).

unconditionally valuable to hold true rather than false beliefs, unconditionally valuable 'not to let oneself be deceived'? Nietzsche suggests not. True beliefs could be regarded as unconditionally more valuable only if there were some guarantee that they brought greater benefit than false beliefs, but for Nietzsche this is not a safe assumption:

Is it really less harmful, dangerous, disastrous not to want to let oneself be deceived? What do you know in advance about the character of existence to be able to decide whether the greater advantage is on the side of the unconditionally distrustful or the unconditionally trusting? But should both be necessary . . . then where might science get the unconditional belief or conviction on which it rests, that truth is more important than anything else, than every other conviction? Precisely this conviction could never have originated if truth *and* untruth had constantly made it clear that they were both useful, as they are.

The explanation Nietzsche offers instead is that, as 'scientific' enquirers, we unconditionally demand of ourselves *truthfulness*—that is, the virtue of not being deceitful, even to ourselves. But this means, he argues, that the ground of our faith in truth is *moral*. Since the crafty flexibility and deceitfulness of an Odysseus<sup>19</sup> have at least as good a case for being useful strategies, where could the unconditional demand for truthfulness come from, other than from morality itself? So, Nietzsche contends that (unwittingly) we find ourselves morally bound into our unquestioning valuation of the pursuit of truth.

What, then, is Nietzsche's alternative? Not the abandonment of all pursuit of truth, let alone the abandonment of the concept of truth. Rather, an attempt to see the value of truth-acquisition as conditional—on the values of health, strength, affirmation, or the degree of viability, bearability, and self-satisfaction we can sustain. Can we put life first, and sacrifice truth-seeking to life if need be? The attempt (or experiment)<sup>20</sup> to do so will mean stepping away from the demand to seek truths at all costs, in two related senses: one is to embrace the deliberate artistic reshaping of our experience as a way of enhancing it for ourselves; the other is to accept superficial appearances and

<sup>19</sup> Alluded to in GS, 344/KSA 3: 576, by the word *polytropoi*. Odysseus is described as *polytropos* in the opening line of the *Odyssey*.

<sup>20</sup> See GM III: 24/KSA 5: 401.

see ourselves as under no constraint to delve beneath them. A resonant and much-quoted passage ends the Preface to *The Gay Science*, combining the related themes of artistic reshaping and the abandonment of any search for a hidden truth:

Oh those Greeks! They knew how to live: what is needed for that is to stop bravely at the surface, the fold, the skin; to worship appearance, to believe in shapes, tones, words—in the whole Olympus of appearance! Those Greeks were superficial—*out of profundity*! And is not this precisely what we are coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit... Are we not just in this respect—Greeks? Worshippers of shapes, tones, words?

(GS, Preface, 4/KSA 3: 352)

One further aspect of the (in the broad sense) scientific conception of truth-seeking enquiry that Nietzsche is out to undermine, is its commitment to an ideal of selfless objectivity:

The lack of personality always takes its revenge: a weakened, thin, extinguished personality, one that denies itself and its own existence, is no longer good for anything good—least of all for philosophy. ‘Selflessness’ has no value in heaven or on earth; all great problems demand *great love*, and only strong, round, secure minds who have a firm grip on themselves are capable of that. It makes the most telling difference whether a thinker has a personal relationship to his problems and finds in them his destiny, his distress, and his greatest happiness, or an ‘impersonal’ one, meaning he is only able to touch and grasp them with the antennae of cold, curious thought. In the latter case nothing will come of it, that much can be promised.

(GS, 345/KSA 3: 577–8)

Opposed to this is Nietzsche’s model of interpretation through the affects, a model in which intellectual insight increases through multiplying affects as far as possible. In the *Genealogy* he speaks of

the capacity to have one’s pro and contra *in one’s power*, and to shift them in and out: so that one knows how to make precisely the *difference* in perspectives and affective interpretations useful for knowledge... *the more* affects we allow to speak about a matter, *the more* eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear on one and the same matter, that much more complete will our ‘concept’ of this matter, our ‘objectivity’ be. (GM III: 12/KSA 5: 364–5)



Nietzsche here urges 'philosophers' to practise a form of enquiry that engages as many personal feelings as possible, and understands its subject matter more fully as a result. His own affectively engaged and rhetorically provocative investigation of the origins of our values stands as a good exemplar of such enquiry.<sup>21</sup>

For Nietzsche the best investigator is not a dispassionate 'pure subject', the object of investigation is not something mysterious and unattainable lurking behind our many experiences, and the exercise of investigation is not self-validating. Truth is multiple, located on the surfaces of things, best found through keeping alive our feelings, and best sought in the service of some values external to the activity of truth-seeking itself, values of health, flourishing, and life-affirmation. So the hard-and-fast distinction between something's being a falsification and something's being an insight into truth is now removed. When Nietzsche returns to the tragic artist proper in *Twilight of the Idols*, art re-emerges as the conveyor of stark truth: 'art also presents a lot that is ugly, harsh, questionable in life,—doesn't this seem to spoil life for us?' (TI, 'Expeditions', 24/KSA 6: 127). On the other hand, 'artists have valued appearance more highly than reality' (TI, 'Reason', 6/KSA 6: 79)—but now the interesting twist: "appearance" here means reality *once again*, only selected, strengthened, corrected.... The tragic artist is not a pessimist,—he says *yes* to the very things that are questionable and terrible, he is *Dionysian*' (TI, III, 6/KSA 6: 79).

So while art reveals ugly truths to be faced and affirmed, at the same time any absolute distinction between 'reality' (the 'true world') and the realm of appearance or illusion can be seen as unstable or bogus.<sup>22</sup> It emerges now that those artist's procedures of simplifying, correcting, and selecting are ways of opening up other perspectives upon oneself, not deceptions but ways of gaining access to something that one genuinely is. Already in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche says that artists

have taught us to value the hero that is hidden in each of these everyday characters and taught the art of regarding oneself as a hero, from a distance and as it were simplified and transfigured—the art of 'putting oneself on stage' before oneself. Only thus can we get over certain lowly details in ourselves. Without this art we would be under the spell of that perspective

<sup>21</sup> See Janaway 2007 on this theme.

<sup>22</sup> See also the much-discussed section of *Twilight of the Idols* entitled 'How the "True World" finally became a Fable' and the influential discussion of it in Clark 1990: 109–17.

which makes the nearest and most vulgar appear tremendously big and as reality itself. (GS, 78/KSA 3: 434)

Artists then seem to be adept at doing what all seekers after improved understanding would need to do anyway, namely engaging their diverse feelings, finding new interpretations, and moving between them.<sup>23</sup> Hence gaining truth about oneself would in the end *be* a skilful process of selecting, simplifying, seeing from a distance, and so on. Selecting and simplifying our view of ourselves is something we must do anyway: artists are simply experts at doing so. In that case, what we gain from all the artistic distorting and styling Nietzsche recommends is, after all, a better insight into the truth.

<sup>23</sup> See Janaway 2007: 202–22 for an account of this.

# 12

## Attitudes to Suffering

### Parfit and Nietzsche

#### 1. Introduction

Some time ago, Philippa Foot wrote, ‘How is it . . . that philosophers today do not even try to refute Nietzsche, and seem to feel morality as firm as ever under their feet? . . . Part of the answer seems to be that a confrontation with Nietzsche is a difficult thing to arrange’ (Foot 2001: 210–11). Derek Parfit’s much-acclaimed book *On What Matters* provides a new opportunity to explore this issue.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the second volume of that work, Parfit dedicates a substantial chapter to Nietzsche, in which he tries to show that Nietzsche disagrees less than might be thought with central normative beliefs that ‘we’ all, or nearly all, hold, and which Parfit believes we can know by intuition. Parfit’s writing on Nietzsche is unlike much that occurs in studies of Nietzsche nowadays. Where even ‘analytical’ writers on Nietzsche tend to show a fair degree of concern for historical or interpretive issues, Parfit approaches Nietzsche’s writings largely as bearing on his own concerns. He principally wants to know whether ‘in ideal conditions, we and Nietzsche would have agreed’ in our normative beliefs (Parfit 2011b: 570), and to that end, he cites or paraphrases over a hundred short extracts from various sources in succession, many from the Cambridge *Writings from the Late Notebooks* volume, and judges them for their truth, plausibility, profundity or helpfulness in the context of his own inquiry. But if Parfit’s approach appears old-fashioned and naïve by current standards of scholarship, it also has a refreshing aspect. One can be over-meticulous or even reverential about the texts, and excessively sympathetic towards their author. Parfit avoids the first pitfall and asks directly what Nietzsche’s significance is for moral philosophy. As for the pitfall of excessive sympathy, while he acknowledges the real sufferings Nietzsche underwent in his life, Parfit nonetheless reminds us of what we do not always trouble to recall: that Nietzsche says shocking things

<sup>1</sup> For another recent response to Parfit’s treatment of Nietzsche, see Huddleston 2016.

that most readers will not remotely agree with, and that there is something disturbing in the fact that a sensitive and thoughtful man such as Nietzsche contrived this elaborate verbal violence and manifested such apparent disdain towards human beings in general.

However, I shall argue that Parfit misinterprets the state of play between Nietzsche and himself. Nietzsche consistently defends a plausible conception of well-being that calls into question certain central normative claims Parfit believes we can know to be true by intuition, in particular the claim that suffering is bad in itself. This fundamental disagreement in normative beliefs challenges Parfit's claim that his (and 'our') normative beliefs are known by intuition. If this is so, why is it important? First, because Parfit's work is in many ways a powerful summation of debates in recent analytical moral theory; secondly, because Parfit considers Nietzsche 'the most influential and admired moral philosopher of the last two centuries', and expresses his own admiration for Nietzsche (Parfit 2011b: 570–1). But if Parfit's discussion misses distinctive features of Nietzsche's work, it does not really confront Nietzsche as such, but rather perpetuates—and by virtue of the depth and prominence of its own moral theorizing becomes emblematic of—the more general impasse between Nietzsche and moral theory that Foot identified.

There is a broader sense in which Parfit does not confront Nietzsche. He does not engage with what is arguably Nietzsche's main claim to fame, the method of genealogy, which, as Bernard Williams has said, is 'likely to reveal a radical contingency in our current ethical conceptions' that 'seems to be in tension with something that our ethical ideas themselves demand, a recognition of their authority' (2002: 20–1). There has been much dispute concerning the question how Nietzschean genealogy is supposed to be, or to enable, a critique of our values,<sup>2</sup> and debates about whether answers to questions about the origins of morality could or should affect our current attitudes are far from settled. Yet, Parfit sidesteps all such issues, saying:

Nietzsche makes some fascinating claims about the origins of morality, especially Christian morality, and he sometimes suggests that these claims undermine morality. But as Nietzsche himself sometimes points out, that is not so. When we learn about the origins of morality, or of many other features of human life, we learn very little about the present state, or value,

<sup>2</sup> For a variety of views, see Nehamas 1985: 107–13; Williams 2002: 20–40; Leiter 2002: 165–92; Foucault 2001; Geuss 2001; Prinz 2007: 215–43; Janaway 2007: 9–14; Doris 2009; Kail 2011.

of things. In Nietzsche's words, 'The more insight we possess into an origin the less significant does the origin appear'. (Parfit 2011b: 583)

This is inadequate. The sentence quoted here is from *Daybreak*, section 44, written before Nietzsche's conception of genealogy reached maturity, and in a passage that is arguably about something other than genealogy.<sup>3</sup> Other evidence shows that in Nietzsche's view, genealogy can 'undermine' morality, at least to the extent of providing grounds for suspicion towards our own moral intuitions. This is a widespread, traditional understanding of Nietzsche's significance.<sup>4</sup> I am not suggesting that Parfit could have no reply to the challenge of genealogy, merely that he has not acknowledged it, and thus has not engaged Nietzsche on Nietzsche's own territory, so to speak. In this respect, he bypasses Nietzsche, as moral theorizing has often done. But then, by his own lights, he bypasses the most influential and admired moral philosopher of the last two centuries. So there is reason for Parfit to diminish either his confidence in his own procedure or his admiration for Nietzsche. In what follows, however, the question is rather whether Parfit successfully confronts Nietzsche on his (Parfit's) own territory.

## 2. Agreeing and Disagreeing about the Value of Suffering

Commentators have long recognized the importance of the value of suffering for Nietzsche, beginning fairly obviously with his early work on tragedy, and continuing into his later critique of values, one of whose preoccupations is the 'morality of compassion' with its apparent drive to eliminate all suffering. For Bernard Reginster, for instance, Nietzsche's central project has as its 'ultimate object of revaluation... the role and significance of suffering in human existence' (Reginster 2006: 185). The value or meaning of suffering matters greatly

<sup>3</sup> According to a reading of the passage by Raymond Geuss, Nietzsche is here rejecting the 'myth of origins', the idea that in investigating the past, we might discover some privileged authority for our present interests and valuations. The point is that we cannot rely on the past to validate or vindicate what we now believe in: 'our forms of valuation can get less and less purchase the further back towards the "origins" we move' (Geuss 2001: 326). Geuss calls this 'tracing a pedigree', and makes the point that '[g]iving a "genealogy" is for Nietzsche the exact reverse of... "tracing a pedigree"' (Geuss 2001: 322). If that is right, this passage leaves Nietzsche's genealogical method untouched and Parfit has given no reason to think that in Nietzsche's view genealogical claims do not undermine morality.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Leiter reminds us of Ricoeur's characterization (Ricoeur 1970: 32) of Nietzsche, along with Marx and Freud, as 'thinkers who taught us to regard with suspicion our conscious understandings and experience, whether the deliverances of ordinary psychological introspection about one's desires... or the moral categories political leaders and ordinary citizens apply to themselves and the social world they inhabit' (Leiter 2004: 74).

to Nietzsche. So it is appropriate that Parfit emphasizes the extent to which Nietzsche's words celebrate suffering as something of positive value. One such passage occurs in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

You want, if possible (and no 'if possible' is crazier) *to abolish suffering*. And us?—it looks as though we would prefer it to be heightened and made even worse than it has ever been! Well-being as you understand it—that is no goal [*Ziel*]; it looks to us like an end! [*Ende*]...The discipline of suffering...has been the sole cause of every enhancement in humanity so far. (BGE, 225/KSA 5: 161)

Parfit comments that such passages 'seem to conflict deeply with what most of [us] believe' (2011b: 571)—'what most of us believe' being, allegedly, that suffering is bad in itself. Yet, he also asserts that Nietzsche merely 'tried to believe that suffering is not bad' (571), and that '[t]hough Nietzsche sometimes denies that suffering is bad,...that is not his real view' (26). Seeking Nietzsche's 'real view' can be an over-optimistic mission. But my principal aim (addressed directly in sections 4–6 below) will be to reveal a view about suffering that is Nietzsche's, and ask how, if at all, it is at odds with Parfit's. In advance of that discussion, it may help to reflect briefly on the term 'suffering', and on Parfit's reasons for foregrounding the question whether Nietzsche agrees or disagrees with 'us'.

The term 'suffering' applies to many kinds of state and to those states in many degrees, as does Nietzsche's word *Leiden*. Nietzsche discusses physical pain, in particular when considering historical attitudes to punishment and cruelty (see GM II: 4–6/KSA 5: 297–302), but his psychologist's eye roams widely over, for example, feelings of guilt, disgust, loss or grief, loneliness, disappointment or dissatisfaction, prolonged illness, catastrophic reversal of fortune and the self-inflicted sufferings of the ascetic. Our judgements about the value of suffering may be influenced by which kinds we emphasize. In Reginster's account, for instance, 'suffering is defined by resistance' (2006: 177). The idea is that we will not only our ends, but also the overcoming of obstacles to their attainment, so that 'if we value the overcoming of resistance, then we must also value the resistance that is an ingredient of it'.<sup>5</sup> One such example is: 'Beethoven's musical achievements had to overcome the intrinsic

<sup>5</sup> A related account is that of Katsafanas 2013a, who argues that something like this structure is constitutive of all agency for Nietzsche and can generate substantive normative conclusions. For a good discussion, see Poellner 2015.

resistance involved in breaking with traditional harmony, developing new forms of musical expression, struggling to articulate complex new musical ideas, and so on' (2006: 179). Here, 'suffering' can be paraphrased by 'what is difficult, or as we might prefer to say, challenging' (177). Nietzsche claims, on this view, that we do—and should—positively value challenges to our will, not its mere satisfaction, and Reginster claims that this idea is important in understanding the notion of will to power. Nonetheless, it is doubtful whether the positive value Reginster describes can transfer to everything usually covered by the term 'suffering'. First, paradigmatic kinds of suffering, such as those typically undergone in bereavement, torture, psychotic experiences, or chronic illness, may seem inadequately characterized just as 'difficult' and 'challenging'. Secondly, although these sufferings are typically obstacles to the attainment of common aims, they are not essential parts or 'ingredients' of a consciously pursued purposive activity. Unlike the 'resistances' to Beethoven's ends, they merely afflict a subject, in the sense of happening to her regardless of her aims.

Parfit's paradigm cases of suffering tend to be episodes of extreme physical pain (e.g. 'the way the red hot iron feels' (2011b: 459, 541))—though he also acknowledges that 'mental suffering... can be much worse than much physical pain' (569). His index contains 'pain, agony, suffering' as one heading, and he easily moves from 'pain' to 'great pain... a sensation that this person intensely dislikes' (459–60, emphases added). The disliking is important here. The mere sensation alone might not be disliked, in which case the person would not be suffering: 'When we are in pain, what is bad is not our sensation but our conscious state of having a sensation that we dislike.... It is our hedonic likings and dislikings... that make these conscious states good or bad' (2011a: 54). Agony, then, is a great pain that the subject intensely dislikes. For Parfit, the claim that 'The nature of agony gives us a reason to want to avoid future agony' is an intuitively recognizable, irreducibly normative truth (2011b: 551). Indeed, on the first page of *On What Matters*, this thought about agony is a prime example of such a normative truth, and it is pivotal later in an extended argument against a subjectivist view of reasons (2011a: 73–82). For now, however, I wish to stress simply the need to be alert to the breadth of the term 'suffering'. For instance, if Nietzsche disagrees with Parfit (and Parfit's 'us') over the value of suffering, it need not be by virtue of thinking that the agony of grasping red hot irons is crucial to a good life.

But why does Parfit place such weight on the issue of Nietzsche's agreeing or not? In the overall scheme of things, Parfit is engaged in countering the Argument from Disagreement, which challenges his claim that we have the

intuitive ability to respond to objective reasons and to recognize some irreducibly normative truths (2011b: 544). If, under ideal conditions of unbiased, well-informed reflection, people would genuinely disagree in their normative beliefs, then, for Parfit, we would have to think ‘How could we be so special? And if none of us could recognize such normative truths, we could not rationally believe that there are any such truths’ (546). However, Parfit believes we shall not reach this position, and counters with the following claim:

Convergence Claim: If everyone knew all the relevant non-normative facts, used the same normative concepts, understood and carefully reflected on the relevant arguments, and was not affected by any distorting influence, we would have similar normative beliefs. (2011b: 570)<sup>6</sup>

The Convergence Claim is an empirical prediction, and Nietzsche comes into play because he appears to threaten its truth: he appears to disagree radically with many of our central normative beliefs. Hence, Parfit’s assertion that ‘in defending the Convergence Claim we cannot ignore Nietzsche’ (2011b: 26).

Parfit focuses on a particular normative belief which he calls ‘the double badness of suffering’: all suffering is in itself both bad for the sufferer and impersonally bad (2011b: 569). This is a normative belief because Parfit is using ‘bad’ in the ‘reason-implying’ sense, such that something’s being bad means that we have reason not to want it. And he defends an objectivist view about what it is for us to have such a reason: if something is bad in itself, intrinsic facts about it count in favour of our not wanting it. Parfit rejects subjectivist views of reasons, according to which our reasons depend on what we in fact desire, or what we would in fact choose if we were fully informed and fully rational. On the objectivist view, by contrast, that we would choose something if we were fully informed and fully rational is made true by the fact that we have reason to want it (2011a: 62–3). So if something is bad in itself, that it is so is for Parfit an irreducibly normative, objective truth, which we can come to know through intuition.<sup>7</sup> The double badness of suffering, Parfit says, is ‘not yet universally recognized’ as a truth, though he hopes that people who disagree will be brought round to it (2011b: 569). The lingering disagreement he especially has in mind hinges on whether we think suffering can be impersonally good when it is deserved. Parfit himself thinks no suffering can

<sup>6</sup> Parfit gives other formulations: ‘... we would nearly all have similar normative beliefs’ (2011b: 25, 563); ‘we and others would have similar normative beliefs’ (2011b: 546) (emphases added).

<sup>7</sup> This is a cumulative view built up through both volumes of *On What Matters*. But see especially 2011a: 31–57; 2011b: 433–9, 542–69.



be deserved—incidentally finding Nietzsche in explicit agreement with him on this.<sup>8</sup> But some disagree here because they think suffering can be deserved when it functions as punishment. Nonetheless, for Parfit, people who take that view cannot disagree with the other half of the double badness claim. They must hold that suffering *is in itself bad for the sufferer*—that is what makes it good as a punishment, in their view.

The claim that suffering is in itself bad for the sufferer has particular salience for Parfit because he thinks it is unlike some other normative claims in that (a) it is ‘not vague’ and (b) ‘we have already reached sufficient agreement about it’ (2011b: 565). The stakes are high, in that case. If Nietzsche disagrees with *this* claim, and if his views seem at all persuasive, we may begin to doubt the claim that agreement on this score is already ‘sufficient’. And if more people come to see things Nietzsche’s way in future, the prediction of convergence is dented to some extent, and that, by Parfit’s own lights, should diminish confidence in our having an intuitive ability to recognize normative truths. Hence, Parfit’s strategy: show that the philosopher who most seems to disagree with the badness in itself of suffering does not really do so.

### 3. The Case for Nietzsche’s Not Disagreeing

Towards the end of his chapter on Nietzsche, Parfit summarizes various grounds for a somewhat weaker claim, that ‘[o]ur disagreements with him are less clear and deep than they seem’ (2011b: 603). But some of his grounds for saying even as much as this seem questionable. Parfit claims, for example, that some of Nietzsche’s pronouncements to the apparent effect that suffering is not bad are not sane. He also finds that Nietzsche contradicts himself. Both are rather hackneyed claims that single out Nietzsche unfairly. Yes, we encounter some ‘appalling’ violent passages in Nietzsche’s late work *Ecce Homo* which may suggest that ‘his mind was starting to disintegrate’ (2011b: 579). However, the sanity of the late works of 1888 has been much debated to little conclusive effect. Some would construe Nietzsche’s virulent writing as literary irony or desperate, frustrated hyperbole in calculated pursuit of a persuasive purpose. Maybe there is a bit of all of these at work. But if we detect incipient disintegration, how much does it matter? As Aaron Ridley comments, ‘what is exaggerated may be true, or interesting, even when pitched

<sup>8</sup> See Parfit 2011b: 583 (citing HH I: 39/KSA 2: 63), and 593.

at a level that can seem deranged' (Ridley 2005: ix). Besides, Nietzsche was sane enough when he wrote *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, on which we shall chiefly rely in what follows. On self-contradiction, Parfit comments: 'Though Nietzsche makes several claims that contradict what most of us would believe, Nietzsche himself contradicts these claims. When he disagrees with himself, he does not clearly disagree with us' (2011b: 595). That is an odd thing to say. Parfit produces no evidence of Nietzsche propounding direct contradictions, merely of his stated views varying according to time and context.<sup>9</sup> Not every passage in Nietzsche's oeuvre fits into a single diachronically stable philosophical position. But few authors could pass such a test across sixteen years of published writings, let alone their notebooks, and to apply it to Nietzsche's output in particular seems unwise. So I discount both insanity and self-contradiction as reasons for believing that Nietzsche does not disagree with Parfit's view about suffering.

More promising *prima facie* for Parfit's case are passages in which Nietzsche looks to be claiming that suffering is good in itself, but on the dubious ground that *everything* is good, or can be *made* good by our affirming or welcoming it (2011b: 571). Nietzsche, we are told, 'tries to believe that everything is good' under the distorting pressure of the need to come to terms with his own suffering, but reasons badly in the process (see 571–2), with the corollary that the ideal conditions for testing convergence are not met, and Nietzsche's disagreement can then be discounted. What is the evidence, though, for Nietzsche's holding suffering to be good, or for his holding everything to be good (let alone holding the former because of the latter)? Parfit cites notebook passages on 'saying yes to existence' as a whole, on pain and suffering being 'desirable for their own sake', or 'part of the *highest desirability*',<sup>10</sup> the passage in *Ecce Homo* where Nietzsche admires Lou Salomé's poem, *Hymn to Life*, for conveying the message 'pain does not count as an objection to life' (EH, 'Zarathustra', 1/KSA 6: 336) and the well-known passage on love of fate—'you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity' (EH, 'Why I am so clever', 10/KSA 6: 297). Parfit apparently assumes that, for Nietzsche, if one were to love everything, say yes to everything or not want anything to be different, then everything would be good, and

<sup>9</sup> For example, when discussing the founding of religions in a passage from 1882 (GS, 319/KSA 3: 551), Nietzsche complains that the religious do not subject their experiences to reason. In 1888, discussing the significance of Socrates for the history of philosophy (TI, 'Socrates', 10/KSA 6: 72), he complains that trusting reason as opposed to culturally acquired instincts is a sign of degeneration. Juxtaposing the passages, Parfit concludes that if someone thinks responding to reason is a route to 'virtue and happiness' (2011b: 594), then Nietzsche 'does not clearly disagree' with them.

<sup>10</sup> WLN, pp. 135–6, note 7[38]; 173, note 10[3]; 207, note 11[30].

a fortiori one's sufferings would be good. However, it is unclear whether Nietzsche thinks so. Must things be good in order for us to love, want or affirm their presence? If so, does loving something for its goodness as a whole require each of its components to be good in itself? I can love a city or a person as a whole and want them to be just as they are, without it being the case that everything about them is good. Also, when Nietzsche talks of 'saying yes to life, even in its strangest and harshest problems' (TI, 'Ancients', 5/KSA 6: 160), it is debatable whether a 'harsh problem' must be construed as in itself a good component of someone's life. So it is not clear that Nietzsche 'tried to believe that everything is good' (Parfit 2011b: 572). If Nietzsche has differing views from Parfit about the value of suffering, it is not safe to dismiss them for resting on this dubious ground.

Finally, when it comes to specifically moral attitudes to suffering, Parfit claims that Nietzsche is *unable* to disagree with him directly.<sup>11</sup> 'Since Nietzsche assumes that moral claims express commands, he seldom if ever uses the concept that we can express in English with the phrase *ought morally*. So Nietzsche's claims cannot straightforwardly conflict with our beliefs about what we morally ought to do' (2011b: 589). Parfit makes a linguistic point here. The German verb *sollen* can be used, as Kant uses it in the phrase *du sollst nicht*: 'thou shalt not',<sup>12</sup> to express a command. Commands cannot be true. But beliefs about what one ought to do or ought not to do, also expressible using *sollen*, can in principle be true. And on Parfit's view, some are because (very roughly) some facts count decisively against anyone's rationally wanting to act in certain ways. In German, Parfit argues, one might confuse the two kinds of claim, and think that the only way for there to be truths about what one ought morally to do is for there to be commands that one must obey. Schopenhauer,<sup>13</sup> as Parfit mentions, is scathing about Kant's ethics on this point (as Anscombe was much later<sup>14</sup>), saying that once you cease to believe in

<sup>11</sup> See 2011b: 589, 603. Parfit has a thematic, and seemingly idiosyncratic, view about what counts as disagreement: many contemporary theorists are said not to disagree with him (or do so 'directly') because they do not use the same concepts. In a review of Parfit's book, Mark Schroeder draws attention to this feature of Parfit's conception of disagreement: 'Bernard Williams, for example, turns out to lack the concept of a reason. John Mackie turns out to fail to have thoughts about morality, rather than to believe that nothing is wrong. Christine Korsgaard lacks normative concepts. Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard's disagreement with Parfit? That's superficial, too—they don't have normative concepts either' (Schroeder 2011). In all these cases, the theorist in questions holds some internal or subjectivist conception of a reason, according to which 'all reasons are provided by certain facts about our present desires or values' (2011b: 432), rather than Parfit's objectivist conception (see, e.g. 435). As Schroeder implies, the idea that in these cases there are no disagreements seems surprising.

<sup>12</sup> *Groundwork*, Preface (Ak. 4:389), in Kant 1996a: 44–45. At Ak. 4:419, Kant uses the form *du sollst nicht*, an archaic form which Schopenhauer (BM, 127/SW 4: 122) cites as betraying the biblical origin of Kant's view of imperatives.

<sup>13</sup> BM, 125–30/SW 4: 120–6. (See Parfit 2011b: 586.)

<sup>14</sup> Anscombe 1958.

a divine issuer of commands, there can be no commands with unconditional authority. Schopenhauer takes this to show that morality is not prescriptive and involves no duties. Nietzsche plausibly owes something to Schopenhauer here, and so it is helpful to realize that if Nietzsche argued straight from the death of God to the non-existence of moral oughts, an equivocation between two ways of reading *sollen* might unravel his argument.

Does Nietzsche argue this way, though? In opposing the non-theistic ethics of George Eliot and the like, he does say that 'Christian morality is a command; it has a transcendent origin; it is beyond all criticism, all right to criticism; ... it stands or falls along with belief in God' (TI, 'Skirmishes', 5/KSA 6: 114). So lapse of belief in the Christian God leaves a justificatory gap for a morality that wants simply to retain Christian moral beliefs about what ought or ought not to be done. But we need not read Nietzsche as saying that lapse of belief in God is by itself sufficient for us to conclude that there is nothing anyone morally ought to do. A more charitable reading of this passage, as Simon Robertson has suggested, has Nietzsche claiming that 'without the religious framework ... one is not entitled to assume that morality is authoritative or that moral values should be retained' (Robertson 2012: 95). This reading is strengthened by the way Nietzsche himself frames his point:

When the English really believe that they 'intuitively' [*intuitiv*] know all by themselves what is good and what is evil; and when, as a result, they think that they do not need Christianity to guarantee morality any more, this is just the *result* of the domination of the Christian value judgement and an expression of the *strength* and *depth* of this domination: so that the origin of English morality has been forgotten, so that no one can see how highly conditioned its right to exist really is. For the English, morality is not a problem yet ... (TI, 'Skirmishes', 5/KSA 6: 114)

Nietzsche's point here is genealogical, and seems pertinent to Parfit, who precisely holds that 'we have intuitive abilities to respond to reasons and recognize some normative truths' (2011b: 544), moral truths among them. For Nietzsche, the adherents of 'English morality' have a strong sense of the *intuitiveness* of their core beliefs, but that sense can be explained in the light of its origin. It is because our present intuitions *became fixed* through past confidence in the authority of religious doctrine that we came to hold our beliefs so firmly. It is because we *forget* that history that we now think they are unconditionally authoritative. Nietzsche is not assuming that 'ought morally'

expresses a command. Rather, he is at his characteristic task of 'spoiling' our confidence in our present attitudes.<sup>15</sup>

Still, Parfit's claim that Nietzsche 'seldom...uses the concept we can express in English with the phrase *ought morally*' may yet be true, even if Nietzsche does not assume that 'ought morally' expresses a command. Quite early on, in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche was prepared to announce that 'morality, insofar as it was an "ought", has been annihilated by our mode of thinking' (HH I: 34/KSA 2: 54). In *Daybreak*, he denies that there are any moral reasons for doing or avoiding anything (D, 103/KSA 3: 91). And the thrust of his later idea of moving 'beyond good and evil' is to urge us not to make moral judgements. So let us assume a bolder premise, and say that Nietzsche *never* uses (as opposed to mentioning) the concept *ought morally* or any equivalent. He never asserts of anything that anyone ought morally to do it or not to do it. Then, according to Parfit, his beliefs are in no position to disagree *directly* (or 'conflict straightforwardly') with a belief that 'Everyone ought morally to avoid or prevent suffering.' However, that leaves plenty of room for disagreement. Nietzsche disagrees by virtue of holding that such a claim, however analysed, is not true. And given that this disagreement is grounded in his denial that 'ought morally' can truly be predicated of anything, it is a disagreement that matters.

#### 4. Growth through Suffering

In pursuit of a 'real view' of Nietzsche's concerning the value of suffering, let us consider some more substantial evidence that Parfit does not mention. In *The Gay Science*, we find the following lucid reflections:

What we most deeply and most personally suffer from is incomprehensible and inaccessible to nearly everyone else; here we are hidden from our nearest, even if we eat from the same pot. But whenever we are *noticed* to be suffering, our suffering is superficially construed; it is the essence of the feeling of compassion that it *strips* the suffering of what is truly personal: our 'benefactors' diminish our worth and our will more than our enemies do. In most cases of beneficence toward those in distress there is something offensive in the intellectual frivolity with which the one who feels compassion

<sup>15</sup> For this notion of spoiling (*verleiden*), see GS, 335/KSA 3: 562.

plays the role of fate: he knows nothing of the whole inner sequence and interconnection that spells misfortune for *me* or for *you*! The entire economy of my soul and the balance effected by 'misfortune,' the breaking open of new springs and needs, the healing of old wounds, the shedding of entire periods of the past—all such things that can be involved in misfortune do not concern the dear compassionate one: they want to *help* and have no thought that there is a personal necessity of misfortune; that terrors, deprivations, impoverishments, midnights, adventures, risks, and blunders are as necessary for me and you as their opposites; indeed, to express myself mystically, that the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell. No, they know nothing of that: the 'religion of compassion' (or 'the heart') commands them to help, and they believe they have helped best when they have helped most quickly! Should you adherents to this religion really have the same attitude to yourselves that you have towards your fellow men; should you refuse to let your suffering lie on you even for an hour and instead constantly prevent all possible misfortune ahead of time; should you experience suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, deserving of annihilation, as a defect of existence, then you have besides your religion of pity also another religion in your hearts, and the latter is perhaps the mother of the former—the *religion of snug cosiness* [*Behaglichkeit*]. Oh, how little do you know of the *happiness* of man, you comfortable and good-natured ones! For happiness and unhappiness are two siblings and twins who either grow up together or—as with you—*remain small* together! (GS, 338/KSA 3: 566–7)

There are minor translation problems here. The word *Mitleid* is translated both as 'pity' and 'compassion'; and *Unglück* as both 'unhappiness' and 'misfortune'. We could be led in different directions here. The questions 'Is it good for me to receive pity over a misfortune?' and 'Is it good for me to receive compassion over an unhappiness?' could well elicit different answers. So let us assume, as the passage seems to require, that *Unglück* is a state in which suffering is felt, and that *Mitleid* is a response to suffering which evaluates it negatively and is normally linked to motivational states that aim at prevention or alleviation.

Nietzsche speaks of the 'religion' of pity or compassion. Although this insinuates that the attitude he is questioning has a cultural origin in a notion of Christian charity, the 'dear compassionate one' need not be a religious believer. Rather, the notion of a 'religion' appears to connote unquestioning adherence to a fixed, putatively authoritative principle, which I suggest must be at least something like the following:

(S) In all cases where a human being is or may be suffering, it benefits that human being to prevent, remove or diminish that suffering.

(S) would provide a general reason to prevent, remove or diminish any suffering, merely on the basis that it is a suffering. But Nietzsche denies (S).<sup>16</sup> First, he argues that people are led to accept (S) for bad reasons. Compassionate helpers assume that removing suffering is as such beneficial for the sufferer, but thereby fail to take account of a value of suffering for the sufferer that is 'hidden' or 'truly personal'. We might say that this kind of helper is typically unable to place particular sufferings in the sufferer's own narrative, in which they may have a particular significance.<sup>17</sup> For the sufferer, undergoing particular sufferings may reconfigure their attitudes in ways that are important to them. They may understand things differently, begin to feel different emotions, be released from feeling other emotions, change their self-conception, develop new capacities, and find a meaning in the course of events or in their life as a whole. Assuming that these are benefits to the sufferer, and that undergoing particular sufferings is a necessary condition of these benefits, (S) is false. (S) masquerades as true, however, to those who seek only a generalizable value for any suffering merely qua suffering, and who thereby implicitly erase the particular, personal, or 'hidden' value from the picture.

Nietzsche's second point is that if one applied (S) to one's own case, finding only a generic negative value in one's actual or possible sufferings, one would be assigning overriding value to a state of *Behaglichkeit*, a comfortable, cosy state, free from all danger or risk. In fact, this conception of well-being as safety from danger may be foundational here, the 'mother' of the principle of compassionate helping. It is not a compulsory conception of well-being, merely factually the prevalent conception. Elsewhere, he questions its value:

Behind the basic principle of the current moral fashion: 'moral actions are actions performed out of sympathy [*Sympathie*] for others,' I see the social

<sup>16</sup> It would be an over-reading to impose any more nuanced principle than (S) on the text of GS, 338. But note that Nietzsche's denial of (S) is not sufficient to challenge Parfit's view of suffering: Parfit can also deny (S), given that some sufferings can be *instrumentally* good, and removing an instrumentally good suffering may not be beneficial to the sufferer. However, as I shall argue, Nietzsche's grounds for denying (S) raise considerations that go against Parfit's view.

<sup>17</sup> There seems to be a parallel thought in GS, 277/KSA 3: 522: 'be it what it may—bad or good weather, the loss of a friend, a sickness, slander, the absence of a letter, the spraining of an ankle, a glance into a shop, a dream, a fraud—it shows itself immediately or very soon to be something that "was not allowed to be lacking [*nicht fehlen durfte*]"—it is full of deep meaning and use precisely *for us!*' Note, however, that in this context, Nietzsche is warning against the temptation to construe such meaning in terms of a 'personal providence'.

drive of timidity [*Trieb der Furchtsamkeit*] hiding behind an intellectual mask: this drive desires, first and foremost, that *all the dangers* which life once held should be removed from it, and that *everyone* should insist in this with all his might: hence only those actions which tend towards the common security and society's sense of security are to be accorded the predicate 'good'.—How little joy people must nowadays take in themselves when such a tyranny of timidity prescribes to them their supreme moral law, when they so uncontradictingly allow themselves to be ordered to look away from themselves but to have lynx-eyes for all the suffering and distress that exists elsewhere! Are we not, with this tremendous objective of obliterating all the sharp edges of life, well on the way to turning mankind into *sand*? Sand! Small, soft, round, unending sand! Is that your ideal, you heralds of the sympathetic affections?

(D, 174/KSA 3: 154–5, translation modified)

The allegation is that in conceiving well-being as absence of suffering, we are driven by an emotional need to treat humans as primarily passive beings who require protection from their surroundings, and that so treating them is liable to promote dullness and uniformity. Nietzsche points out that in fact, to the contrary, we positively value in human beings the active capacity to create, to transform or give new forms and meanings to things, including ourselves. But this capacity is liable to be valued less, and exercised less, to the extent that a community accepts the evaluation of suffering represented by our earlier principle (S). As a consequence, the individual's capacity for self-development and creative achievement is not promoted.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche turns the tables on the 'religion of pity', saying that while *it* seeks to protect the passive 'creature in the human being', *he* has pity for the potentially transformative 'creator' character of human beings that stands to be stifled through adherence to something like our principle (S). Hence, to its adherents, he exclaims 'Well-being as you understand it—that is no goal; it looks to us like an end!' (BGE, 225/KSA 5: 161). To 'measure the value of all things according to *pleasure* and *pain*' is to measure them 'according to incidental states and trivialities' because 'there are problems that are higher than any problems of pleasure, pain and pity; and any philosophy that stops with these is a piece of naïveté' (BGE, 225/KSA 5: 161). (Thus, when Parfit begins his whole project with the statement that 'on any plausible theory [of well-being] hedonism covers at least a large part of the truth' (2011a: 40), real disagreement is already brewing.)



The presence of suffering, and of an attitude of acceptance which ‘allows your suffering to lie on you’, promotes what Nietzsche considers a superior kind of well-being. Other passages show the contrast clearly—for example:

If we...want to *transcend our own pity* and thus achieve victory over ourselves, is this not a higher and freer viewpoint and posture than that in which one feels secure when one has discovered whether an action *benefits* or *harms* our neighbour? We, on the other hand, would...strengthen and raise higher the general feeling of human *power*, even though we might not attain to more. But even this would be a positive enhancement of *happiness*.

(D, 146/KSA 3: 138)

In *Gay Science*, 338, Nietzsche’s alternative conception of well-being employs the concept of personal *growth*. If you and your community adopt (S) religiously, your happiness will not *grow*, he says, but remain small. It is not easy to specify what this growth consists in. But it would appear to involve enhancement of one’s capacities to understand and make sense of one’s experiences, to assign coherent narrative significance to them and to feel a sense of power. Nietzsche claims that if we subscribe to principle (S), we are failing to recognize that this form of growth belongs to well-being, and that experiences of suffering are necessary for this form of growth to occur. Acting upon (S) would tend to diminish well-being both in the case of others’ suffering and one’s own.

These views of Nietzsche’s are, I suggest, readily intelligible, and they are not his alone. He was remarkably prescient of some views in contemporary psychology, where since the 1990s, empirical study has tended to confirm the occurrence of what is called *post-traumatic growth*. To quote from one of its proponents:

Psychologists now realize that it is naïve to seek to live a life in which there is no sadness, and no misfortune, and hence that the pursuit of happiness must include learning how to live with, and learn from, adversity.... psychological well-being refers to...autonomy, a sense of mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, and purpose in life.

(Joseph 2011: 14–17)

Many studies appear to confirm the claim that traumatic experience can enhance psychological well-being so conceived. Nietzsche’s conception of well-being looks similar: we have seen personal growth literally mentioned

in the passage from *Gay Science*, 338, and four of the other aspects of well-being here—autonomy, sense of mastery, self-acceptance, and purpose in life—are paralleled by passages in his writings.<sup>18</sup>

The case studies in this post-traumatic growth literature are exemplified by that of a woman who had suffered a sexual assault, saying of it ‘it was a turning point . . . If I was to erase the past then I wouldn’t be who I am today’ (Joseph 2011: 70). Similarly, the professor of psychiatry Kay Redfield Jamison wrote of her own severe experiences of bipolar disorder, that, given the choice of having the condition or not having it: ‘Strangely enough I think I would choose to have it . . . Because I honestly believe that as a result of it I have felt more things, more deeply; had more experiences, more intensely . . . I have been aware of finding new corners in my mind and heart.’<sup>19</sup> This seems close to the kind of attitude to suffering Nietzsche had in mind when he aspired to ‘say yes to life even in its strangest and harshest problems’, and thought of rejoicing at the return of one’s life in every detail without wanting to exclude its sufferings. Nietzsche’s own illness gives him opportunity to be his own case study:

I doubt that such pain makes us ‘better’—but I know that it makes us *deeper*. . . one emerges from such dangerous exercises in self-mastery as a different person, with a few more question marks, above all with the *will* henceforth to question further, more deeply, severely, harshly, evilly, and quietly than one had previously questioned. (GS, Preface, 3/KSA 3: 350)

Suffering then can enhance well-being, if one conceives well-being as Nietzsche conceives it. Finally, Nietzsche believes that human beings already operate with an attitude to suffering compatible with his conception. As he observes in the *Genealogy*,

Man . . . does *not* negate suffering in itself: he *wants* it, he even seeks it out, provided one shows him a *meaning* for it, a ‘*for-this*’<sup>20</sup> of suffering. The

<sup>18</sup> See GS, Preface, 3/KSA 3: 350: ‘self-mastery’ (*Herrschaft über sich*); GM I: 10/KSA 5: 270: ‘yes-saying to oneself’ (*Ja-sagen zu sich selber*); GS, 335/KSA 3: 563: ‘human beings who . . . give themselves laws’; GS, 347/KSA 3: 583: ‘a delight and power of self-determination’ (*Selbstbestimmung*); GM III: 1/KSA 5: 339: ‘the basic fact of the human will: . . . it *needs a goal*.’ ‘Positive relations with others’ may seem an exception since Nietzsche tends to conceive post-traumatic well-being more in terms of the strength to love one’s isolation from others. However, he does regard self-cultivation as a route to benefiting others, and contrasts it favourably with over-concern about protecting others from harm. See D, 174/KSA 3: 155; GS, 290/KSA 3: 531.

<sup>19</sup> Jamison 1997: 218–19. I owe the quotation to Roberts 2008: 745–6.

<sup>20</sup> *ein Dazu des Leidens*. Amended from the published translation.

meaninglessness of suffering, not the suffering itself, was the curse that thus far lay stretched out over humanity. (GM III, 28/KSA 5: 411)

It is a reasonable assumption that if something contributes to someone's well-being, then it is good for them, and if it is detrimental to their well-being, it is bad for them. So if Nietzsche has an intelligible conception of well-being, we are entitled to read him as holding that things can be good or bad for someone in the light of that conception. One way of regarding Nietzsche's view is as follows. If a course of events—say, a life, or some portion of a life—instantiates as a whole what we can call *growth-through-suffering*, it may contribute to a recognized form of well-being. Such a course of events can both be good as a whole and have suffering as an *indispensable component*. We fail to understand this and substitute an inferior conception of well-being, if we uphold principle (S) 'religiously', believing that every instance of suffering is to be removed or prevented. A life cleansed of suffering would be low on well-being, a stunted life.

## 5. Bad Parts of Good Wholes

However insightful we find the considerations raised in the previous section, they may not be conclusive against the claim that suffering is bad in itself in Parfit's reason-implying sense. For something we have reason not to want can make a contribution to some wider state of affairs that we have reason to want. We may endure something that in itself is bad, as a necessary condition of some overall good's obtaining. So, accepting that Nietzsche identifies the distinctive good that we have called growth through suffering, and that suffering is a necessary condition for the occurrence of growth through suffering, it may yet be the case that in itself suffering is bad for the sufferer. If so, perhaps the most we can conclude from Nietzsche's line of thought is that we do not always have *decisive* reason not to want suffering.

One obvious way for this to be the case is if suffering is assigned a merely *instrumental* value. Suffering that is bad in itself (say, a painful medical procedure) can clearly be a means to an end that is good in itself, and need not trouble Parfit. Parfit (2011b: 571) interprets some of Nietzsche's utterances as claims that suffering is instrumentally good: for instance, the assertion in *Beyond Good and Evil* that 'profound suffering makes noble' (BGE, 270/KSA 5: 225). We might add the similar-sounding 'The discipline of suffering... has been the sole cause of every enhancement in humanity so far' (*alle Erhöhungen*

*des Menschen bisher geschaffen hat*, BGE, 225/KSA 5: 161). If Nietzsche's thought is that abolishing suffering from life would be undesirable because it can be a cause of enhancements, then he need not disagree with Parfit's belief that all suffering is in itself bad. Well-being can be enhanced by courses of events in which suffering, though bad in itself, causes good outcomes.

Nietzsche has no more reason than anyone to deny that suffering can be instrumentally good. However, the position represented by *Gay Science*, 338 does not collapse into that view. Consider, for example, the admittedly rather obscure notion of 'letting your suffering lie upon you', which at least must involve standing in an *attitude* to the suffering. If, as seems likely, growth through suffering encompasses a range of further attitudes towards the suffering, such as 'mastering' and 'affirming' it, or coming to *understand* or *learn about* it, *interpreting* or *giving a meaning* to it, then the relation of the suffering to the growth is not the causal necessity characteristic of suffering that is merely a means to a good end. (By contrast, the value we typically assign to painful medical treatment is not owed to any *interpretation* or *meaning* the patient gives it.) But it is still not clear whether the overall good of growth through suffering conflicts with suffering's being bad in itself. In deciding that issue, a distinction made by G. E. Moore may provide some help. Moore distinguishes two ways in which something bad in itself can be a necessary condition for some overall good. In addition to the case where something is necessary as a means to a good effect, there is the case of what Moore (1993: 78–88) calls an *organic whole*.<sup>21</sup> Here is how Moore explains the contrast. When something is a means to something good, its relation to the good is 'merely a natural or causal necessity', so that if the laws of nature allowed it, the 'utter annihilation' of the means 'would leave the value of that which it is now necessary to secure entirely unchanged'. That is to say, the good end, if caused in some other way, would still be good. By contrast, in the case of an organic whole, 'the good in question cannot conceivably exist, unless the part exist also. The necessity which connects the two is quite independent of natural law' (81). In this case that which is good (the whole) could not survive the absence of any of its parts.

It seems to make better sense of Nietzsche's growth-through-suffering to view it as a good organic whole of which suffering is a part, rather than as a good end to which suffering is a means. However, that still leaves open the possibility that suffering is bad in itself. For in the Moorean conception, the

<sup>21</sup> I owe to Zaibert 2014 the observation that Parfit appears to ignore the conception of an organic whole developed by Moore in this passage.

value of an organic whole is not equal to the sum of the values of its parts. It is not simply a case of accumulating contributory amounts of good. According to the Moorean view, removing suffering would mean completely destroying the good whole that is growth-through-suffering, and yet the suffering could still be bad in itself since the contribution of a part to a good whole is compatible not only with the part's not being good in itself, but in principle even with the part's being bad in itself. I say 'in principle' to reflect Moore's own rather qualified view: 'Whether the addition of a bad thing to a good whole may increase the positive value of the whole, or the addition of a bad thing to a bad may produce a whole having positive value, may seem . . . doubtful; but it is, at least possible' (1993: 79). So if growth-through-suffering is an organic whole of this kind, the Nietzsche of *Gay Science*, 338 *does not have* to deny that suffering is bad in itself.

Other, more direct considerations might push us towards the view that Nietzsche *must* construe suffering as bad in itself. Take the person who has achieved well-being through suffering: say, a bipolar sufferer similar to Jamison. Let us accept that it was good for her that she suffered precisely what she suffered, in that her bipolar episodes played an indispensable role in her growth as a person, enabling her to understand and feel more deeply. Her life would have been worse without her mental sufferings. Now we might recoil somewhat: it is all very well for our subject to take this rosy attitude to her sufferings retrospectively, but if we return her to her state before the onset of those particular sufferings, she would have dreaded the prospect of them, would not in any way have wanted them and would almost certainly have tried to prevent them if possible. While she was undergoing these experiences, the same negative attitudes would have been present, only more deeply felt. So it is hard to see how in these cases she could then have regarded the occurrence of her suffering as in any way good. Taking the suffering all by itself, outside of any 'growth-through-suffering' sequence, would she (or any of us) not have reason not to want it—i.e. would it not be bad in itself, whatever other good it eventually contributed to? Secondly, the bipolar sufferer's experiences (and likewise any sufferer's experiences) might in fact not have enabled her to find meaning, achieve growth or however we characterize it. It is obvious that many sufferings remain unredeemed in this way. People who suffer can die or become otherwise incapable before their sufferings have a chance to become part of a 'growth' sequence. Or their sufferings can remain brute and undigested features of their life from which nothing is gained. Surely, the mere facts about these unredeemed sufferings would count in favour of the subject's not wanting them? Such thoughts may make it seem plausible that

suffering is in itself bad for the sufferer, even given Nietzsche's views in *Gay Science*, 338. For if unredeemed suffering is, simply qua suffering, bad in itself—intrinsically bad—for the sufferer, it would seem impossible that the same sufferings, had they been part of a Nietzschean growth-through-suffering sequence, would somehow *not* have been bad in themselves. At least, Moore's conception of an organic whole dictates this much because the intrinsic value of a part of such a whole is invariant: it cannot have one intrinsic value when it is part of a whole and a different intrinsic value when it is not.

If Nietzsche held that the suffering that is an indispensable part of growth-through-suffering is nonetheless bad in itself, would he be in agreement with Parfit after all? On the simple claim that suffering is bad in itself, Yes. But Nietzsche also claims that wellbeing is enhanced by having in your life the kind of good state of affairs for which suffering is a (non-causally) necessary condition. And that suggests that suffering sometimes, in some contexts, is something we have reason to want. At any rate, for Nietzsche, trying to prevent ourselves from suffering would be detrimental to our well-being. So on this view, Parfit's statement that suffering is bad in itself is at best incomplete or misleading. We do not have reason to wish suffering absent, or perhaps even to wish it diminished—even if it is bad in itself.

However, this Moorean picture of Nietzsche's position involves a certain degree of internal strain. We have to believe that our lives become impoverished—*worse*—by failing to contain things that are *always in themselves bad* for us. How are we to explain this? The picture has it that suffering is invariant in value, bad in itself in the context of any whole. Its presence is non-instrumentally necessary to the existence of some good wholes, and it is also part of some bad wholes, but its own invariant value gives no explanation of how it contributes differentially to the value of these wholes. We seem to have reason to want suffering in many contexts, but not in others, even though its own value never changes and it always gives us reason not to want it. Jonathan Dancy has argued that Moore's picture is flawed in general, in that it

commits one to saying... that though there is no reason to preserve the part as a part [or in our case: there is reason not to preserve the part as a part], there is a reason to protect the whole, and that reason derives from the presence of the part. Now this does sound incoherent. Surely we have reason to protect the part here, if it is contributing value. (Dancy 2003: 631)

Dancy argues that to remove this difficulty, we should accept that a part may vary in value as it 'moves from whole to whole' (Dancy 2003: 629). If this is so,

then in principle the very same instance of suffering can be something we have reason not to want when it is part of one kind of sequence, and something we have no reason not to want (or even reason to want) when it is part of another. Nietzsche's view, I shall suggest, is of this kind: suffering is not, in itself, invariantly good or bad.

## 6. Nietzsche Genuinely Disagrees

If Nietzsche indeed denies that suffering is bad in itself for the sufferer, we reach an interpretation of Nietzsche's notion of growth through suffering that is preferable on two grounds: (1) it removes the strain inherent in the Moorean organic whole picture and (2) it squares well with the textual evidence. The result is that Nietzsche genuinely disagrees with Parfit's most salient example of a normative truth knowable by intuition.

First, however, we must disarm the challenge posed once again by Parfit's suggestion that Nietzsche does not directly disagree with 'us' to the extent that he does not use the same concepts. Parfit says, 'I have mainly discussed beliefs that involve . . . the reason-implying concepts *good* and *bad*. . . . Since Nietzsche seldom if ever uses these concepts, he seldom disagrees directly with these beliefs' (2011b: 603). But the last claim here is far from obvious. The point of the *Genealogy's* first essay, for instance, is to distinguish the morally saturated concept *evil* from the concept *bad* (and to distinguish *good* from, in effect, *morally good*), and Nietzsche expressly wants to retain the concepts *good* and *bad*, in a non-moral sense: "*Beyond Good and Evil*". . . . At the very least this does not mean "*Beyond Good and Bad*" (GM I: 17/KSA 5: 288). But is *bad* a reason-implying concept for Nietzsche? It is hard to see why not. In a much-discussed passage from *Daybreak*, he states that there are 'other reasons than hitherto' for doing or avoiding some actions (D, 103/KSA 3: 92). And Nietzsche makes plentiful negative evaluations of his own: he asserts plainly and without qualification that many things are harmful, dangerous, disgusting, unhealthy and so on—all ways, plausibly, of being bad. Things that are harmful or unhealthy need not be so universally—they may be harmful or unhealthy only for some human being or some type of human being.<sup>22</sup> But if

<sup>22</sup> Leiter 2002 argues persuasively that Nietzsche can (and, for his critique of morality, must) hold a realist position about what is good or bad for an agent. See also Hussain 2013: 396. But note that Leiter 2014 takes a different view, arguing that Nietzsche does not require this realist position.

something is bad in one of these ways, a natural construal is that those human beings for whom it is bad have reason not to want it.

When Parfit asserts that something is bad in itself in the reason-implying sense, he means that intrinsic facts about it objectively count in favour of our not wanting it. It would be quite unfounded to impute *this* notion of reason-implying badness to Nietzsche, in the light of the passage in *The Gay Science*, in which he says 'Whatever has *value* in the present world has it not in itself, according to its nature...but has rather been given, granted value, and we were the givers and granters!' (GS, 301/KSA 3: 540).<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, it would be rash to credit Nietzsche with a commitment to there being intrinsic facts about things.<sup>24</sup> However, Parfit encourages us to imagine what Nietzsche would say if (counterfactually) he could be convinced to adopt Parfit's understanding of *good* and *bad* in the reason-implying sense: 'we can try to predict whether, if we and Nietzsche had used the same concepts, and the other ideal conditions were met, we would have had similar normative beliefs' (Parfit 2011a: 590). If Nietzsche had used the concept bad in just the way Parfit uses it, would he have agreed that all suffering is in itself bad for the sufferer? I suggest not.

Textual evidence points to Nietzsche's denying the badness in itself of suffering. In *The Gay Science*, 388, Nietzsche does not say that suffering, although evil and hateful, nonetheless contributes to the overall good of growth through suffering. He pointedly says that if you regard suffering 'as evil, hateful, deserving of annihilation, as a defect of existence', you are making a *mistake*. The mistake arises from making a normative claim about suffering in isolation, paying no attention to the 'whole inner sequence and interconnection' in which it stands. Again, he says that 'Man does not negate suffering in itself', and that the 'curse' is merely the presence of suffering that cannot be given a meaning (GM III: 28/KSA 5: 411). We may still put the point in terms of wholes and parts. When we concentrate, like the 'dear compassionate one', on assigning value to the suffering in itself in isolation, we miss the value that lies in the whole of which the suffering is a part and in which it acquires meaning for the sufferer. Wholes in which suffering is a necessary part of growth through suffering are good—they contribute to well-being—and

<sup>23</sup> Note, however, that the 'we' here applies not to all human beings, but to 'higher human beings' who are the 'thinking-sensing ones' (*die Denkend-Empfindenden*), as opposed to 'so-called practical human beings'.

<sup>24</sup> In the light of KSA 12: 105 (2[85]): 'if we think other "things" away, then a thing has no properties, i.e. there is no thing without other things'; and 353 (9[40]): 'that things have a constitution in themselves...is a quite idle hypothesis: it would presuppose...that a thing released from all relations would still be a thing'. See also Nehamas 1985: 80–1.



wholes in which suffering remains simply brute, uninterpreted, unlearned-from, unredeemed suffering may well be bad, or something that there is reason not to want one's life to contain. But that is compatible with suffering's being neither good nor bad in itself, invariantly and across all contexts.

Further specification of Nietzsche's position is, I think, underdetermined by the textual evidence. One view he might conceivably hold is that the 'whole inner sequence and interconnection' is the *sole* bearer of value in growth through suffering, with the component tokens of suffering mere neutral occurrences, each lacking either positive or negative value. An objection to this view might be that the 'curse' of meaningless suffering cannot just consist in the fact that something that has happened remains meaningless (as most occurrences surely do). The source of badness here is rather that *you have suffered and* are stuck with the suffering's meaninglessness. How would that be bad if there is nothing bad about the episode of suffering as such? In response, we may note that there are non-normative claims about suffering that may cloud the issue. For instance, it is true that suffering is negatively felt by the sufferer. For Parfit, suffering is always disliked. But these are arguably analytic truths, and at any rate, they are not normative claims. Parfit is clear that when we dislike pain, it is not for any reason (2011a: 54–6). Secondly, it is true that human beings naturally tend to want to avoid suffering. This is a psychological or anthropological fact, and so also not a normative claim. When we thought earlier about people undergoing unredeemed suffering, we thought of them undergoing states that *feel bad*, and to which they are likely to have a clear *aversion* or *resistance*. But that is compatible with holding that no suffering taken atomistically is either good or bad in the reason-giving sense. On this view, Nietzsche's denial of the badness of suffering could be summarized as 'it is good to have in your life things that are bad.' But rather than meaning 'you have reason to want your life to contain some things that you have reason not to want', this would mean 'you have reason to want your life to contain some things that feel bad and to which you naturally tend to be averse.' ('Saying yes to life in its harshest problems' can perhaps be heard this way).

Another view compatible with Nietzsche's utterances is effectively that urged by Dancy: that suffering is not normatively neutral, and that it can be either good or bad in the reason-implicating sense—can be something we either have reason to want or not to want—but that which value it has varies according to the context it is in. It seems plausible to regard Nietzsche's position at least as congenial to such a view, even if, as so often with Nietzsche, it is never stated in theoretical terms. Suffering that is part of a whole growth-through-suffering sequence is something we have reason to

want because its occurrence enhances our well-being. Suffering that is part of a sequence in which it remains meaningless is something we do not have reason to want, and may have reason not to want. If Nietzsche holds such a view, then he disagrees with Parfit. And, as we have argued, if he used the Parfitian concept *bad* in the reason-implying sense, Nietzsche would *not* agree that intrinsic facts about suffering as such objectively count in favour of our not wanting it. Nietzsche would then genuinely, and directly, disagree with Parfit.

Now it would be possible for Parfit to claim that someone's taking the position about the value of suffering that we have attributed to Nietzsche would not provide a counterexample to the Convergence Claim. For there to be genuine divergence in normative beliefs (divergence that matters), both parties must satisfy the conditional element of Parfit's Convergence Claim: 'If everyone knew all the relevant non-normative facts, used the same normative concepts, understood and carefully reflected on the relevant arguments, and was not affected by any distorting influence.' We have argued that if Nietzsche used the same normative concepts as Parfit, he would not agree that suffering is bad in itself. But in principle, the other conditions could still fail. If it could be shown that someone taking the position we have attributed to Nietzsche would have been ignorant of some relevant facts, or would not have understood or reflected sufficiently on relevant arguments, then the mere fact of the position's disagreeing with Parfit would not be detrimental to convergence. However, the same point must apply to Parfit: if he had not considered facts about growth through suffering, or had not reflected sufficiently on arguments concerning the possibility that variable values attach to parts when they contribute value to different wholes, he would not be in genuine disagreement with Nietzsche as we have presented him. So our true conclusion is that *either* there is a genuine disagreement here that threatens convergence, *or* Nietzsche has made a mistake somewhere *or* Parfit has made a mistake somewhere. An allegation of mistaken reasoning could be levelled at the view that things that contribute value to wholes can vary in their own value across different contexts. But should it turn out no easier to fault the argument for that view than arguments against it, we would be faced, at the meta-level, as it were, with another absence of convergence.

## 7. Conclusion

Parfit states that Nietzsche's apparent disagreement with the badness in itself of suffering is something 'we cannot ignore'. If the disagreement is genuine,

resulting from sane, unbiased, factually well-informed, rational reflection, we cannot be confident of our ability to know the truth of the normative claim 'suffering is bad in itself.' Parfit states that Nietzsche's real view is not in disagreement with that normative claim. But we have found Nietzsche to give a coherent and convincing description of growth through suffering, a genuine phenomenon that is attested by empirical psychology and recognizably based in a plausible conception of well-being. The necessity of growth through suffering for well-being makes it untrue, in Nietzsche's view, that suffering is bad in itself for the sufferer. His disagreement with Parfit is therefore not merely apparent. Parfit discounts as genuine disagreements cases where the putatively disagreeing parties are not using the same concepts. But he allows that we can at least ask whether they would agree, if they were using the same concepts. He claims that Nietzsche would not disagree with the badness in itself of suffering, if he used the Parfitian reason-implying concept *bad*. We have given grounds for denying that. For Nietzsche, suffering has no invariant reason-implying value across all contexts in which it occurs. When it occurs in the context of a 'whole sequence and interconnection' that is growth through suffering, then—according to a plausible reading of Nietzsche—we have reason to want it, and reason not to eliminate it from our lives. According to Parfit himself, Nietzsche's disagreement matters. It poses a challenge to the Convergence Claim, and throws some doubt on Parfit's crucial belief that we can know normative truths by intuition. Parfit might be able to formulate some more complex normative claim about suffering upon which his intuitions and those of Nietzsche (and of 'all of us') will one day converge, but in the material to hand he has not done so.

# Nietzsche on Morality, Drives, and Human Greatness

## 1. A Formula for Human Greatness

Especially in his later works Nietzsche makes a point of idealizing a kind of attitude towards oneself. The attitude in question is sometimes wanting or willing, sometimes loving, sometimes affirming or saying ‘Yes’. Nietzsche’s formula for human greatness in *Ecce Homo* is, familiarly enough, ‘*amor fati*: that you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity, still less to conceal it . . . but to love it . . .’ (EH, ‘Why I am so clever’, 10/KSA 6: 297). And in *Beyond Good and Evil* he describes ‘the ideal of the most high-spirited, vital, world-affirming individual, who has learned not just to accept and go along with what was and is, but who wants it again and again *just as it was and is* through all eternity’ (BGE, 56/KSA 5: 75). This alludes to the affirmation of eternal return, an attitude you might imagine yourself having if you were so ‘well disposed to yourself and to life’ that when faced with ‘the question in each and every thing, “Do you want this again and innumerable times again?”’ you would want nothing more fervently (GS, 341/KSA 3: 570). The possibility of glimpsing this ideal is granted to someone positioned ‘beyond good and evil, and no longer, like Schopenhauer and the Buddha, under the spell and delusion of morality’ (BGE, 56/KSA 5: 74). So in Nietzsche’s eyes it is a non-moral or supra-moral ideal. Elsewhere Nietzsche makes clear the incompatibility between holding the values of morality and being able to affirm the eternal recurrence of one’s life: ‘To *endure* the idea of recurrence one needs: freedom from morality’.<sup>1</sup>

When he presents his test of ‘How well disposed you would have to become to yourself and to life’, by means of the thought of eternal return (entertained in a brief moment of isolation and vulnerability), Nietzsche mentions only two extreme reactions: either gnashing of teeth, cursing, and being crushed, or tremendous elation and longing. However, it is not clear that the well- or

<sup>1</sup> KSA 11: 224 (publ. as WP 1060).

ill-disposedness in question must be simply a matter of either/or; it may be that what is tested is the degree of your well-disposedness to *yourself* and to *your life*.<sup>2</sup> Read in this way, the ideal will be that of attaining such well-disposedness to the highest degree possible. Notice also that this ideal is not put in the form of an imperative or injunction. Nietzsche does not here say how one ought to live. The force of the passage is not 'Live in such a way that you take this attitude to yourself.' Rather, Nietzsche proceeds by questions and conditionals: if you were confronted with the thought of eternal recurrence, how would you feel? If you felt a tremendous elation, and if you adopted the practice of asking about each and every thing 'Do I want this again and again?', and if you could manage to answer 'Yes' every time, what degree of well-disposedness to yourself and life would that confirm in you? There is of course an implied assertion: it would show that you were well-disposed to yourself to the highest degree possible. But Nietzsche does not here enjoin us to live in some way, nor does he even say that this is how all of us or any of us should live, or ought to live, or ought to regard our life. The text allows us, I think, to jettison the idea of imperatives here, and see Nietzsche's ideal as differing in this respect from morality, or at least morality as Nietzsche tends to portray it. Here, I suggest, he is trying to describe what it would be to be this ideal type of individual. Loose parallels might be to ask: how great a specimen of physical prowess would you have to become to succeed in winning the London Marathon ten times in a row? How great a composer would you have to become to sustain consistent style, expressiveness, and narrative through writing a cycle of four substantial operas? In these cases I do not enjoin you to do anything but, by way of a question and a conditional, I make an implicit evaluative claim to the effect that you would be excellent in one respect if you could do those things. I simply say what a certain kind of greatness would consist in.

On the other hand, what is an ideal? Can there be an ideal that has no normative implications? If some state is an ideal one to be in, that implies an *evaluative* claim: the state is a *good* state to be in; it is also a *better* state to be in than other relevant states (such as being sufficiently well-disposed to oneself only to affirm selected parts of one's life, or being so ill-disposed as to negate it all, or being indifferent about most parts of it). An ideal state must also be, I take it, the *best* state to be in relative to such a range of competitor states. It could perhaps be argued that Nietzsche's ideal must have some kind of normative force, if one thought along the following lines: if a state is

<sup>2</sup> Possibly also to 'life' as such in some wider sense that I shall not discuss here.

describable as good, better, or the best to be in, it follows that someone would have reason to be in such a state, or reason to want to be in such a state. And if this entailment were thought to hold in general, then, if a state were the best to be in, someone would indeed have more reason to be in it, or want to be in it, than any other relevant state, and Nietzsche's ideal would be at least implicitly normative. This is not the place to debate whether that general entailment from evaluative to normative status holds, nor is it easy to see how we would show whether Nietzsche conceives value in such a way that the entailment holds. If it does not hold, then Nietzsche's ideal of being so well-disposed to oneself and to life that one could affirm the eternal return of each and every thing can be the best state for someone to be in, without that someone having any reason to be in it or want to be in it. If the entailment does hold, then someone would have reason to be in or want to be in such a well-disposed state. But we should also think about the extension of the 'someone'. One of the objections Nietzsche frequently throws at morality is its assumption that *all* human agents ought to do, to feel, to be such-and-such or have some reason to do, feel, or be such-and-such, and one of the relatively uncontentious points in the interpretation of Nietzsche is that he wants to eschew making any specific prescriptions that are binding on all agents.<sup>3</sup> Part of the explanation for this is his view that there is no one condition that is good for all individuals. Another is that in his view only a restricted number of individuals are capable of greatness. Must a good state be good for me if I can attain it? Can a state be good for me only if I can attain it? The ground is somewhat tricky, but here is one intelligible position: it would be good for someone to attain the state of total self-affirmation, if, but only if, they are capable of total self-affirmation. If this is accepted, then given Nietzsche's view that only a few are capable of attaining the ideal, any implicit normativity, any reason to be, or want to be, totally self-affirming, would apply at most to a few human individuals.<sup>4</sup>

However, note that on this reading it is attaining or sustaining the state of affirmation that is excellent, not what is affirmed. Nietzsche does not speak of assessing or judging the amount of good that a life contains. Rather his question seems to be: given the amount of suffering, lack, boredom, and

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, GS, 335/KSA 3: 563: 'Sitting in moral judgment should offend our taste. Let us leave such chatter and such bad taste to . . . the many, the great majority! We, however, want to *become who we are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves!'

<sup>4</sup> I am ignoring here the question whether other agents would have reason to promote the greatness of the few capable of it. For an argument that this is Nietzsche's position, see Hurka 2007.

triviality in a life, how well-disposed can you be towards it? Elsewhere he talks of 'Saying Yes to life in its strangest and hardest problems.'<sup>5</sup> So his stance would appear to be: life has not fulfilled all my desires, it is not perfect, I cannot change that, but can I still love it? That is the greatest test: to want, love, or say yes to what is strange and hard, what is painful, harmful, or perhaps just tedious or meaningless ('even this spider and this moonlight between the trees' in GS, 341/KSA 3: 570, 'the small human being' in Z, 'The Convalescent', 2/KSA 4: 274)—to affirm what goes against one's will or eludes its scope. The notion of wanting even what goes against one's will may sound troubling, but elsewhere I have suggested that affirming the whole of one's unalterable life makes sense if one operates with a distinction between first- and second-order willing:

Numerous events in any life will be undergone, remembered, or anticipated with a negative first-order attitude; but that is compatible with a second-order attitude of acceptance, affirmation, or positive evaluation towards one's having had these negative experiences. If in some course of events one is, say, humiliated, one's experience is as such unwelcome, painful, and so on: . . . Nietzsche poses [the] question: would you be well enough disposed to want your life again, where that (second-order) wanting would embrace among its objects the particular hateful and excruciating humiliation from which you suffered?<sup>6</sup>

So the most excellent human being would not be someone who found everything in his or her life perfect, or even good or desirable, but someone who could affirm his or her life, yawning imperfections and all, without flinching. It also sounds as if the harder and stranger the life, the greater the excellence manifested in affirming it.

## 2. The Highest Human Being: Internal Conditions

Nietzsche often expresses an ideal of greatness in a different way, in terms of the state of the internal constitution of a human being's drives and instincts. Here is a passage from Nietzsche's notebooks of 1884 (in my translation):

<sup>5</sup> TI, 'What I owe to the ancients', 5/KSA 6: 160. Nietzsche also quotes this passage again in EH, 'The birth of tragedy', 3/KSA 6: 312.

<sup>6</sup> Janaway 2007: 257–8. Bernard Reginster's analysis of will to power as Nietzsche's criterion of value gives it a similar structure: 'the structure of a *second-order desire*: . . . a desire for the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of some determinate first-order desire' (2006: 132).

The human being, in contrast with the animal, has bred to greatness in himself a plenitude of *opposing* drives and impulses: by way of this synthesis he is master of the earth. Moralities are the expression of locally restricted *orders of rank* in this multiple world of drives: so that the human being does not perish from their *contradictions*. Thus one drive as master, its opposing drive weakened, refined, as impulse that yields the *stimulus* for the activity of the chief drive. The highest human being would have the greatest multiplicity of drives, and also in the relatively greatest strength that can still be endured. Indeed: where the plant human being shows itself as strong, one finds instincts driving powerfully *against* one another (e.g. Shakespeare), but bound together. (KSA 11: 289)

There seems to be an implication in this passage that ‘drive’ (*Trieb*) and ‘instinct’ (*Instinkt*) are more or less equivalent. I shall, at any rate, accept this as a working assumption.<sup>7</sup> But we need some conception of what a drive is for Nietzsche. A great diversity of things are called drives by Nietzsche from time to time. What unites them, by way of a minimal characterization, is that they are relatively<sup>8</sup> enduring dispositions to behave in certain ways, which are not within the full rational or conscious control of the agent. Paul Katsafanas<sup>9</sup> has recently given a more detailed set of conditions that Nietzschean drives satisfy. He argues that a drive is a disposition that manifests itself by informing an agent’s perception of objects, generating an evaluative orientation towards them, and thereby bringing it about that the agent’s action, conscious reflection, and thought takes place in the service of a goal of which the agent is ignorant. Katsafanas draws a parallel with Schopenhauer’s account of sexual desire. Here the human individual consciously desires and pursues the individual beloved for his or her personal attractiveness and in the hope of a unique satisfaction for him- or herself with that individual. But all this conscious motivation obscures from the individual the genuine goal of sexual activity, which is the most favourable reproduction of the species. I am sympathetic overall to Katsafanas’s account of Nietzschean drives, but would raise a question about the last part of it: that a drive provides an agent with a structuring goal of which he or she is ignorant. Need this be the case? Take another plausible kind of drive for Nietzsche: a drive whose goal is artistic self-expression. Must it be the case that, in order for me to have this drive, I remain

<sup>7</sup> Paul Katsafanas argues that *Trieb* and *Instinkt* are in general terminological variants for Nietzsche, and that the English ‘instinct’ as currently used is a misleading translation of the latter term (Katsafanas 2013b).

<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of ‘relatively’ will be discussed below.

<sup>9</sup> Katsafanas 2013b.



ignorant of its goal? Is it not probable that I will be able to figure out, by examination of my behaviour, that this goal permeates many of my actions? Nor does it seem necessary to think that, once I recognize this about myself (and perhaps start consciously pursuing an artistic career because I recognize my drive), the *drive* to artistic self-expression must cease to operate in me. It might indeed be that such a drive structured my behaviour without my knowledge, but it does not seem constitutive of something's being a drive that I be ignorant in the way described. It does seem constitutive, by contrast, that I cannot fully *control* the drive to artistic self-expression by conscious thought or rational decision. That is to say, I cannot decide not to have this disposition, or choose not to have it structure my perceptions and evaluations. A drive is a disposition of the agent that the agent cannot switch on or off at will. If someone has a sex drive, then they are disposed to episodes of sexual desire and sexualized perception, not because they want to be or have decided to be so disposed, or because they have grounds or reasons to be. Hence I would prefer to say that a drive is a relatively enduring disposition of which the agent may be ignorant, but which, even when the agent has some awareness of it, operates in a manner outside the agent's full rational or conscious control, and which disposes the agent to evaluate things in ways that give rise to certain kinds of behaviour.

Much can be extrapolated from the notebook passage quoted above.<sup>10</sup> Thus one factor concerning a drive is its own degree of strength or weakness. A drive that is comparatively strong will presumably have a resilient tendency to persist, structure experiences, and give rise to motivational states in many different contexts over time. A sex drive, for instance, will be strong if it makes its agent persistently seek out objects of attraction and frequently gives rise to relevant occurrent desires, and it will be weak if it rarely does so. Another obvious way in which drives may be weaker or stronger is in relation to one another. An individual may find his or her desires or perceptions on many occasions shaped by one drive at the expense of another, which *can* motivate the individual but fails to do so when the dominant drive is activated. For instance, a sex drive may be present in someone, but be consistently weaker in its expressions than a drive to self-denial that is also present (if we may posit such a drive)—or the opposite may be the case. Considering individual drives on the axis weak–strong, Nietzsche regards the presence of strong drives as characteristic of the greatest or healthiest type of human individual.

<sup>10</sup> Richardson 1996: 48 gives a similar account of the aspects and relations of drives, drawing on many other sources in Nietzsche.

Another valuable feature in Nietzsche's picture of the highest human individual is the multiplicity, fullness (*Fülle*) or (as I translated it) plenitude of his or her drives. The more numerous the drives that can be sustained in one individual, the greater that individual will be. This helps to rule out some examples that it would be rather ridiculous to consider paradigms of human greatness. For instance, someone who has a strong, even domineering drive towards collecting stamps,<sup>11</sup> together with a few more mundane drives, say, to sleep and to eat, is an over-simplified individual who does not approach Nietzschean greatness, however fervent and dominant his chief drive may become. And even someone whose *only* strong drive was to philosophize or to compose music would not satisfy this model of plenitude.

In addition, Nietzsche requires that this internal multiplicity of strong drives must be unified, united: they must in some way make up a single whole. In stating the philosopher's ideal in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche writes: 'Only this should be called greatness: the ability to be just as multiple as whole, just as wide as full' (BGE, 212/KSA 5: 147). We may also mention here his later idealization of Goethe: 'What he wanted was *totality*, he fought against the separation of reason, sensibility, feeling, will... he disciplined himself to wholeness' (TI, 'Skirmishes', 49/KSA 6: 151). We might describe the requirement here as one of organic unity.<sup>12</sup> So we have the following as aspects of the 'internal' ideal of greatness: strength of individual drives, multiplicity of the range of drives, and wholeness or organic unity within that multiplicity. But this unity (as yet still in some respects an obscure notion) must satisfy a further condition: it must be a unity between elements that *conflict*. We might perhaps call it a Heraclitean unity (bearing in mind such fragments as 'in differing, it agrees with itself-a back-turning harmony [or connection, *harmonie*]' and 'justice is strife, and... all things come about in accordance with strife'<sup>13</sup>). One way to describe it is in terms of the strength of the system of drives as a whole. The elements of the system tend in different directions and threaten to overpower one another, or to destroy organic unity. But when the whole system is strong, rather than falling apart, the drives

<sup>11</sup> Ken Gemes' example. See Gemes 2009b: 57. Gemes argues that such an individual would not be *expressing* the full range of his or her drives, and so would not count as a unified self, on the assumption that 'Nietzsche as a naturalist believes that as humans we come with a rich panoply of inherited drives.' I argue below that for Nietzsche such inherited drives could die out in the case of some individuals, in which case there could theoretically be an individual with just one such master-drive. My position is that even were this possible, it would not be a case of greatness because of the lack of fullness in the range of drives that *exist* in the person.

<sup>12</sup> A term used by Hurka 2007: 24.

<sup>13</sup> Heraclitus, fragments B51, B80, trans. in Barnes 2001: 50, 71.

function together towards ends that are those of the individual as such.<sup>14</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil* 200, Nietzsche gives this characterization of great individuals who can occur in ages of ‘disintegration’:

... a human being will have the legacy of multiple lineages in his body, which means conflicting (and often not merely conflicting) drives and value standards that fight with each other and rarely leave each other alone... and if genuine proficiency and finesse in waging war with himself (which is to say: the ability to control and outwit himself) are inherited and cultivated along with his most powerful and irreconcilable drives, then what emerges are those amazing, incomprehensible, and unthinkable ones, those human riddles destined for victory and seduction; Alcibiades and Caesar are the most exquisite expressions of this type. (BGE, 200/KSA 5: 120–1)

Note (returning to our previous passage) that human beings in Nietzsche’s picture have ‘bred’ the plenitude of drives into themselves. This alerts us that the relations that obtain between what Nietzsche calls drives or instincts are not necessarily immutable givens of human nature, even of an individual’s nature, but are responsive to modification by cultural means. I want to argue further that the same applies to the presence of the drives and instincts themselves: according to Nietzsche’s use of ‘instinct’ and ‘drive’, such things need not be built unchangeably into human beings—neither generically into humans qua humans, nor into the constitution of any human being considered individually. How an individual’s drives operate over time, and even what drives an individual continues to have, is open to change. But take a weaker point first: at the very least the relative strengths and weaknesses of drives are alterable over time—Nietzsche thinks of them as constantly ebbing and flowing. In a particularly rich passage in *Daybreak* he presents drives as continually waxing and waning in response to ordinary experiences:

... our daily experiences throw some prey in the way of now this, now that drive, and the drive seizes it eagerly... Every moment of our lives sees some of the polyp-arms of our being grow and others of them wither, all according to the nutriment which the moment does or does not bear with it... [T]he drive will in its thirst as it were taste every condition into which the human being may enter, and as a rule will discover nothing for itself there and will

<sup>14</sup> For a good account of how we might conceive the various interactions among drives, see again Richardson 1996: esp. 16–72.

have to wait and go on thirsting: in a little while it will grow faint, and after a couple of months of non-satisfaction it will wither away like a plant without rain. (D, 119/KSA 3: 111–12)

This raises the possibility that a drive, if not nourished, may simply disappear. ‘Withering away’ need not, I suppose, strictly be interpreted as connoting ceasing to exist or operate, and Paul Katsafanas has suggested<sup>15</sup> that here Nietzsche may mean instead that the drive loses its power and ceases to influence us for some time, not that we lose the drive entirely. In his recent paper Katsafanas<sup>16</sup> states that ‘drives cannot be eliminated.’ I agree that a drive is such that it cannot be eliminated at will by the agent it manifests itself in. By wilfully abstaining from sexual activity, I do not *eo ipso* rid myself of my sex drive. Also it is the case that a drive is not eliminated by its being discharged, however often, in occurrent motivational states. By engaging in sexual activity, I do not cease to be disposed to sexual activity either. But the passage just quoted seems clearly to allow that some drives, at least, may disappear from the agent through lack of ‘nourishment’ by their environment. Some plants that wither for lack of rain obviously do die rather than just ‘growing faint’, and I am not persuaded of any reason why Nietzsche would not accept the transfer of this part of his simile to drives.

Conversely, for Nietzsche, drives can come into existence, or at any rate something that was at some time not a drive in some individual can come to be a drive for that individual. In *The Gay Science* he says that, through education, a way of thinking can ‘become habit, drive and passion’ and rule over an individual (GS, 21/KSA 3: 392). Elsewhere Nietzsche talks of a wide variety of things having ‘become instinct’ for people of certain types: ‘Knowledge of the privilege of freedom’ or ‘consciousness of freedom’ (GM II: 2/KSA 5: 294); ‘an incapacity for resistance’ (A, 29/KSA 6: 199–200); ‘refinement, boldness, foresight, measuredness’ (KSA 13: 314); ‘noble coolness and clarity’ (KSA 13: 582) and even—most importantly for my overall concerns in this paper—‘morality’ itself (KSA 8: 434). Hence the inclusion of ‘relatively’ in my characterization of a drive: a drive is a *relatively enduring* disposition of which the agent may be ignorant, but which, even when the agent has some awareness of it, operates in a manner outside of the agent’s rational or conscious control, and which disposes the agent to evaluate things in certain ways and to behave in certain ways.

<sup>15</sup> Private communication.

<sup>16</sup> Additional note: Katsafanas 2013b: 746.

The range of Nietzschean drives is also surprising. In *Daybreak* 109 there is a 'drive to restfulness'; and in the same place 'fear of disgrace and other evil consequences' and 'love' are both called drives. In *Daybreak* 119 we learn of idiosyncratic drives to 'tenderness or humorousness or adventurousness or to our desire for music and mountains' and also that everyone will have more striking examples of their own. This suggests that some drives, at least, are not common to all human beings. And if a drive can in principle wither away, it becomes unsafe to assume of any drive that it must be present in all human beings at all times or that it must always be present in some individual if it ever is. There may be extremely common drives, such as the drive to sexual satisfaction, or to self-preservation. Some such drives may be not just common but universal to all human beings. Some may even be innate. But even if, for whatever reason, a number of such apparently generic drives are in fact found in all human beings—and Nietzsche indeed talks of 'all the basic drives of human beings' (BGE, 6/KSA 5: 20)—they need not have an equally prominent explanatory role in all humans or even be immune to disappearance in all human beings. The examples Nietzsche gives also make it impossible to circumscribe what counts as a drive by saying, for example, that all drives are biological or physiological in any sense that would exclude their being acquired by learning or cultural conditioning. And despite our likely expectations for the word 'instinct', the evidence does not suggest that what Nietzsche calls *Instinkte* are different from drives in this respect.

So greatness in human beings, like health or strength, is not an all-or-nothing affair, either at one time, or across times. It looks now to be a matter of degree across all of its parameters: individual drives can be weaker or stronger, there can be more or fewer of them, they can conflict more or less, and be better or worse bound together. And time and circumstance can shift the drives in either direction along these different dimensions, even to the point of creating new drives and destroying old ones. The highest human being, then, will be such in virtue of *attaining* a state in which he or she has a multiplicity of conflicting but unified, relatively enduring, strong dispositions, which dispositions structure his or her perceptions and give rise to motivational states, without being under his or her full rational control.

So far our description of internal conditions specifies only that the drives be individually strong, as multiple as possible, in conflict, and bound into a unity, thus characterizing a type of person as the 'greatest human being'. Nothing is said concerning *what* the drives composing that type of human being are drives towards. If we read it this way, this statement of internal conditions will

be both necessary and sufficient for greatness. Yet it is not beyond dispute that Nietzsche intends it in that way. It might be that greatness is to be measured more conventionally in terms of achievement, for which there are some implicit 'external' criteria of value: on that reading one would be great only if one writes great operas, founds great empires or republics, invents great cures for illnesses, and so on. But Nietzsche can still hold that the internal conditions are necessary for any kind of greatness, and that they, in a sense, specify the essence of greatness, the one common factor that is to be found in all cases of great achievement, of whatever kind. He might also hold that no one who satisfied the internal conditions could fail to achieve *something* great, so that even if greatness must be partially constituted by achievements, the internal conditions are sufficient for there to be great achievements, and in that sense still sufficient for greatness. But we have already become very speculative here. It is unclear what 'external' criteria of great achievement Nietzsche would accept. I shall continue to concentrate on the internal conditions, which are the common factor in all greatness, even if not wholly constitutive of it.

### 3. Greatness and Self-Affirmation

We have seen that when looking for a 'formula of greatness' Nietzsche thinks on the one hand of an ideal evaluative attitude towards oneself: rather than being someone who has a great or good life, one is great because one is, to a high degree, positively disposed towards oneself, seemingly whatever one's life has contained. On the other hand he says that human greatness has as its condition certain internal properties and relations of drives and instincts that pertain whether one knows it or not. How do the attitude of self-affirmation and the internal condition relate to one another? A discussion of similar issues by John Richardson suggests one possible answer. His answer is framed in terms of the *Übermensch* or 'overman', a notion I am avoiding in this paper, but here I simply want to replicate Richardson's point in terms of the notion 'greatest human being' without, for now, presupposing anything about how those two notions relate. Richardson is opposing the view (expressed by Bernd Magnus) 'that the *Übermensch* is not an ideal type, but stands for a certain attitude toward life (and especially toward the thought of its eternal return)—an attitude that implies no specifiable character traits'. In opposition to this Richardson states 'I agree that the overman has this attitude, but I argue that he can have it only because of a certain structuring of his drives—so that

Nietzsche does have in mind a type of person.<sup>17</sup> On this view, one's being a certain type of human being, a type characterized by states of the drives, explains one's ability to be well disposed to oneself to a great degree. So human beings internally constituted in the right way will be the ones capable of the ideal attitude of self-affirmation. Or: one's being able to pass the test for holding the attitude of maximum self-affirmation is explained by one's having a constitution with a strong, full, conflicting but unified set of dispositions of the kind Nietzsche calls drives and instincts. I am sympathetic to this thought, but do not think it tells the whole story.

#### 4. Unity, Agency, and Chance

One large and (I think) troubling question in the interpretation of Nietzsche is this: what, for Nietzsche, brings about or constitutes the *unity* among drives that is requisite for greatness in a human being? We have the idea that drives or instincts are 'bound together' (*gebündigt*), and that there is 'synthesis' of them within the single human being. Is this a harnessing together of functions that requires no conscious agency because it is literally organic? In other words, does a human being whose drives are unified to any degree have the same *kind* of unity as a healthy octopus or oak tree whose unity consists in their functioning sufficiently well to persist as organisms? Is the human case simply one of greater multiplicity and greater internal tension, but still the same *kind* of functional unity? Nietzsche's phrase 'the plant human being' (*die Pflanze Mensch*) carries this connotation. However, the passage on Goethe perhaps points elsewhere. Goethe's wholeness is said to be something he wanted or willed (*wollte*) and something he did or made: 'he disciplined himself.' That does not sound like the kind of thing non-human organisms could do. According to this passage, Goethe brought elements of himself into new relations with one another. He brought about, by will, a synthesis within himself. What that consists in seems pretty unclear, but it would at least appear to be something one does, as an agent, some kind of action. The rest of the passage on Goethe is compatible with this: he 'said Yes to everything related to him', he 'conceived of a strong, highly educated human being...'—presumably willing to turn himself into such a being—'... who could dare to

<sup>17</sup> Richardson 1996: 67 n. 104. For the contrasting view of the *Übermensch* as solely 'standing for an attitude' see Magnus 1983 and Magnus 1986.

allow himself the entire expanse and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom’.

‘Saying Yes’, ‘conceiving’, and ‘allowing oneself’ are agency words, and the whole exercise is even said to be one of ‘freedom’. So we have to face a question about these states of wholeness, totality, or unity among conflicting elements that Nietzsche tends to associate with being a great or a higher human being: are they ever, or to any extent, brought about by self-awareness, intention, and action (details still to be specified), or are they formations of drives and instincts that come about independently of any agency, in the manner of ‘the rare cases of powerfulness in soul and body, the strokes of luck among humans’ he mentions in the *Genealogy* (GM III: 14/KSA 5: 367)? Or do they somehow occur in both ways? It must be said that many passages favour the view that detaches consciousness and agency from any role in affecting the state of the drives. The rich section 119 of *Daybreak* discussed above is a prime example. Nietzsche’s leading point there is that no one can fully know the totality of drives that constitute his being, and that ‘their number and strength, their ebb and flood, their play and counterplay among one another, and above all the laws of their *nutriment* [*Ernährung*] remain wholly unknown to him. This nutriment is therefore a work of chance [*Zufall*].’ Recall also the famous line ‘Becoming what you are presupposes that you do not have the slightest idea *what* you are’ (EH, ‘Why I am so clever’, 9/KSA 6: 293). And a forthright notebook passage says ‘The multiplicity of drives—we must assume a master, but it is not in consciousness, rather consciousness is an organ, like the stomach’ (KSA 11: 282). Following this line of interpretation, then supposing we are right to think that Goethe went through a process of ‘becoming what he was’, then all of his self-disciplining, conceiving himself a certain way, willing to be a certain way, saying ‘yes’ to parts of himself, was just redundant as far as the core of that process was concerned. His ‘self-mastery’ occurred outside of his own conscious activity. But then the problem of interpretation is this: why would Nietzsche make so much of all this supposed activity if it really were redundant?

We have here, I suggest, two pictures of wholeness or unity: an ‘agency’ picture and a ‘chance’ picture. Some commentators would favour pushing one or other picture into the background as something Nietzsche did not really mean. (Brian Leiter, for instance, would remove all the agency talk as a mere aberration from what he considers Nietzsche’s genuine position, which is a kind of fatalism.<sup>18</sup>) But we might pause to consider other interpretive

<sup>18</sup> Leiter 2002 (esp. ch. 3).



approaches to the issue. One possibility is that Nietzsche is in tension and fails to disentangle these two positions with sufficient clarity. It could be argued that no peculiar culpability need attach to that, since to stumble over problems in reconciling agency and consciousness with a naturalistic psychology is likely enough in any theory, and hence only to be expected in an unsystematic, multilayered exercise of rhetorical provocation and critique such as Nietzsche's. However, another more generous construal is that states of greatness, specified in terms of the necessary internal conditions of the drives, may be differently realizable: some great human beings may turn out that way by chance, others, because of their different cultural context, may need to attain it by action and conscious hard work.<sup>19</sup> For example, a member of an ancient aristocratic warrior caste may simply *be* a case of well-attuned powerful drives without having to perform any work of 'unification' upon himself.<sup>20</sup> We moderns, with our developed inner life, reflectiveness, and learned self-denying tendencies, may well, like Goethe, require some kind of demanding work as agents, some self-disciplining or self-governing, before our drives behave in the right way to satisfy the internal condition for greatness.

A bold interpretation would be that an attitude of self-affirmation might be what *constitutes* the unified functioning of conflicting strong drives in the latter kind of human being. It could be that, in a surprising parallel to Kant's synthetic unity of apperception, the 'synthesis' of my drives is brought about from the top, as it were, by my very attitude of affirmation, my 'owning' all the drives as mine; or, to parody Kant, that the 'I will' must be able to accompany all the expressions of my drives, since otherwise they would not one and all be *my* drives. Clearly an organism such as a cat has some kind of functional unity of drives, for Nietzsche. But the cat cannot take the second-order attitude of affirming its drives as its own: it cannot accept or reject its drives, cannot be pleased or displeased by their presence or by their particular expressions, cannot try to extirpate or promote some drives rather than others, and so on. No human being has complete knowledge of his drives, and no one is in full rational control of their presence or mode of expression. But these factors are not sufficient to put cat and human exactly on a par with respect to their drives. In the human case there is the possibility of attaining a greater degree of unity in the process of taking attitudes to oneself. Consider once again

<sup>19</sup> A suggestion made by Ken Gemes.

<sup>20</sup> Such an individual might, however, score relatively low on the parameters of multiplicity and internal conflict of drives. In this respect, modern complexity is more conducive to greatness for Nietzsche—though simultaneously imprisoning us in a condition that makes greatness harder to attain and harder even to conceive.

someone with a strong sexual drive or a strong drive to artistic self-expression. While these drives persist, the agent might be continually striving to *disown* them, having set him- or herself to be abstinent and socially conforming. Might not the human being who willed themselves to Goethean wholeness be someone in whom, by contrast, such conscious striving against drives was absent, and whose will aligned itself with as many of the drives as possible, thereby constituting the drives as more of a unity?

This constitutive proposal will not quite do, however. Nietzsche's official story about striving against one's drives is that given in *Daybreak* 109: 'at bottom it is one drive *which is complaining about another*'. There is no 'will' that can stand apart from the drives, in the following sense: 'that one desires to combat the vehemence of a drive . . . does not stand within our own power.' We should not, then, posit any separate 'self' that has full knowledge of and full control over the drives: that I strive to accept or resist one of my strong drives is not a fact about an 'I' that exists independently of my set of drives. My set of drives is one that is capable of forming self-conscious attitudes towards some parts of the set. But Nietzsche will say that the fact that I can take a self-affirmative attitude is really just a fact about my drives: a state of my drives manifests itself in self-consciousness as an attitude I take towards my drives.

Finally, however, I want to argue for a different account of the linkage between self-affirmation and the constitution of the drives, with the causality running the other way round from that suggested by our earlier discussion of Richardson. There, the ability to be self-affirming was explained as a symptom of the internal structure of the drives. I want to suggest that in Nietzsche's picture our attitudes of self-affirmation or self-negation might in addition *cause* alterations to our drives and their relations to one another in such a way as to move them nearer to a state in which they satisfy the internal conditions for human greatness. The excellence of the affirmative attitude to self might play a role in *making* one's mutable set of drives become richer or stronger. But can the causation run in the right direction to make this in principle possible for Nietzsche? To see that it can, let us turn to the question of what difference morality makes to the attainment or non-attainment of the kind of internal conditions for greatness we have described.

## 5. Morality as Symptom and Danger

Nietzsche's causal stories about morality run in two directions. In many prominent instances the state of the drives causes conscious or self-conscious

attitudes. Nietzsche says ‘Morality is the expression . . . of orders of rank among these drives: so that the human being does not perish from their contradiction’. For ‘expression of’ I suggest we might substitute the highly Nietzschean notion ‘symptom of’. A morality is at least a set of values of some kind, and to adhere to such a set of values is to adopt attitudes, which include evaluative beliefs and affects—for instance the belief that stronger human beings ought in general not to harm others, the belief that human beings are essentially free to act in certain ways, the feeling that it is blameworthy and in some cases shocking if someone rejects compassion in favour of self-interest, the feeling of guilt over our tendencies to self-assertion, the outrage felt over an act of cruelty, judgements as to why such outrage is justified, and so on. According to Nietzsche, our feeling these feelings, having these beliefs, and giving these justifications is a symptom of the way certain human drives are or have been ordered. Let me exemplify what I take to be the shape of Nietzsche’s position here by giving an over-simplified sketch based on parts of the discussion in the *Genealogy*. People who Nietzsche calls ‘the weak’ or ‘slaves’ have certain drives that tend towards discharging themselves. They have a drive towards retaliation against those who abuse them, but cannot express this drive directly because they lack the power to do so. Drives are opposed by other drives, so let us posit in them a drive to self-protection or self-preservation that inhibits the drive to retaliation. Still, the drive to retaliation persists in latent form and eventually produces the feeling of gaining power over the more powerful, a feeling attained by re-describing the powerful as ‘evil’ and describing harmlessness as ‘good’. Thus a configuration of drives gives rise to a resolution of the conflict within itself by producing the conscious attitudes we have mentioned above: the beliefs that there is free will, that the strong are free to act weakly, that all deserve equal treatment, that suffering is always to be avoided, and their associated affective responses.

An interesting feature of Nietzsche’s account, however, is that our resulting moral *conception* of what we are—our conception of what about us has positive value and what has negative value—and the attitudes that it leads us to take towards ourselves also *cause* us to become beings with fewer, weaker, less coordinated drives, and with less tolerance of their internal conflict. According to morality’s conception, a human being ought not to express a whole range of desires that are regarded as selfish, unruly, and liable to increase suffering and inequality. Humans who adopt the attitudes characteristic of morality then come to hate or disown parts of themselves: they feel guilt about the very existence of many parts of the psyche and seek to identify themselves with a (supposed) pure good-seeking will that is free of the

appetites and instincts and stands in opposition to them. And in Nietzsche's view the set of beliefs and other evaluative attitudes we consciously hold as adherents of morality, as well as being a symptom of a certain state in which the drives stand, is also a force that shapes and perpetuates the state of our drives. Thus it is that morality—moral attitudes—can be both a symptom and a 'danger', a decidedly causal notion when one thinks about it.<sup>21</sup> And Nietzsche could scarcely be more explicit about this duality of causal direction: 'Precisely here I saw the great *danger* to humanity... I understood the ever more widely spreading morality of compassion... as the most uncanny *symptom* of our now uncanny European culture', he says in the Preface to the *Genealogy* (GM, Preface, 5/KSA 5: 252, my emphasis). Hence we need a knowledge of 'morality as consequence, as symptom, as mask, as Tartuffery, as sickness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, as medicine, as inhibitor, as poison' (GM, Preface, 6/KSA 5: 253). So for Nietzsche morality is not simply other than, or contrasted with, the supposed greatness that human beings can attain in the constitution of their drives. It inhibits the attainment of that greatness. And the relation between morality and the drives has a certain circular or self-perpetuating structure. People in whom drives are already impoverished, weakened, or reduced in number have these drives ordered and contradictions among them resolved when they adopt moral attitudes; the having of moral attitudes also impoverishes, weakens, reduces their drives, or acts to preserve them in such a state.<sup>22</sup>

As we argued earlier, what drives and instincts there can be is variable between individuals and variable over time within an individual. Drives or instincts are mutable, they ebb and flow, can be newly acquired, and can die out altogether. They respond to their day-to-day environment, thriving if nourished, declining or ceasing altogether if starved. Now take the instincts that Nietzsche polemicizes against in the *Genealogy*, 'the instincts of compassion, self-denial, self-sacrifice' (GM, Preface, 5/KSA 5: 252). If these instincts are influential on my behaviour, it is not that I describe myself as someone in whom an instinct of self-denial has come to be dominant, weakening and

<sup>21</sup> See Katsafanas 2005: 1.

<sup>22</sup> Since some of our conscious beliefs about ourselves act as dangers, inhibitors, nourishers of our drives, they cannot be epiphenomenal, at least in the sense of not being causes at all. (Incidentally, the prominent passage where Nietzsche apparently announces 'there are no mental causes!'—'Es giebt gar keine geistigen Ursachen!' (TI, 'The four great errors', 3/KSA 6: 91)—does not have to be interpreted as saying that no conscious mental states cause anything. In context, Nietzsche's point is that there is no *Geist*, no subject or I that is the cause of thoughts and actions: he is diagnosing the error of positing 'the will, the *Geist* and the I' here.) On the issue of epiphenomenalism in Nietzsche see Katsafanas 2005 and Leiter 2002, esp. 92).

perhaps shutting down drives to creative self-expression, adventurousness, or whatever else. Yet by my conscious activity I may nonetheless be continually providing for this instinct of self-denial an environment that nourishes it at the expense of other drives and instincts: I have acquired the belief that it is always right to put the interests of others first, I sometimes act on it and think I ought to act on it more often, I feel passionately that all human beings are intrinsically equal in value, I feel guilty if I hurt anyone else, I am outraged if someone hurts others and does not feel guilty, I like reading Schopenhauer's essay *On the Basis of Morals* because I warm to the idea of compassion being the source of moral goodness, and so on. In other words, a major shaping influence on the environment that nourishes my instinct of self-denial and starves other drives is found in my own consciously held attitudes; that is, my morality, my acquired set of moral beliefs, feelings and such. Nietzsche makes also the more subtle point that drives that do not ebb away or die out may have their nature and value modified by being harnessed by already moralized drives. In another passage from *Daybreak* he says that one and the same drive may be 'attended by either a good or a bad conscience'; for example a drive to avoid retaliation may evolve into a feeling of cowardice or of humility, but 'In itself it has, *like every drive*, neither this moral character, nor any moral character at all, nor a definite attendant feeling of pleasure or displeasure: it acquires all this, as its second nature, only when it enters into relations with drives already baptised good or evil' (D, 38/KSA 3: 45).

Nietzsche places great emphasis on his claim that the *origin* of moral attitudes lies in the drives of the weak and powerless, and as a result it is sometimes wondered how these moral attitudes could come to be inculcated in someone who is not similarly weak or powerless. Part of the answer, we can now suggest, lies in our degree of ignorance of our drives and their interrelations with one another, combined with the power of conscious attitudes to be part of the environment that causes changes to our drives. Without intentionally setting out to weaken one's drives, reduce their number, or change their order of rank, one may affect one's drives in such ways through day-to-day behaviour in a certain milieu of evaluative attitudes. So someone who is not in need of resolving their resentment, not in a master-slave relation, not a lamb at the mercy of birds of prey, can, by virtue of consciously inhabiting the moral milieu, be caused to become someone whose drives keep being impoverished. The *genesis* of this milieu is to be explained by its suiting the slavish and resentment-prone, but the milieu of consciously held attitudes, once stabilized, can in turn have *effects* on diminishing the drives of the average unremarkable modern *Mensch*, the diligent, comfortable scholar, and also of any potentially higher, potentially great 'strokes of luck' among humanity who

happen to be around. Returning to our earlier question—How does an attitude of self-affirmation relate to human greatness conceived in terms of the strength and unity of drives?—we can say that self-affirmation is not only a *symptom* of internally constituted greatness but a *facilitator* of it.

As we have seen, Nietzsche issues frequent admonitions about the redundancy or non-importance of consciousness. This sits somewhat awkwardly with some aspects of his re-evaluative project. The calling into question of moral values is for Nietzsche a prelude to a revaluation of values, and that—some evidence suggests—is an act of free choice of some kind. But never mind that much, which is contentious. Leave it at this: revaluation incorporates *acts*. ‘Doing’ words are everywhere in Nietzsche’s conception of how new values will, or might, come about: invention, discovery, creation, law-giving, tasks, attempts;<sup>23</sup> affects are not just undergone, they are used, brought to bear on topics, allowed to speak (GM III: 12/KSA 5: 364–5). But suppose that we are especially impressed by the admonitions about the redundancy of consciousness, and we think in consequence of a Nietzsche whose *one and only* re-evaluative *end* is to enable the development of stronger, more multiple, more synthesized conflicting drives below the level of consciousness,<sup>24</sup> then my point is that even this Nietzsche would nonetheless have good reason to use *as a means* the attempt to detach us from our present conscious self-evaluations, and good reason to use as a means anything that might enable people to cultivate conscious self-affirmation.

Nietzsche’s persuasive process consists, very roughly,<sup>25</sup> of showing up a variety of psychological origins for our judgements, inducing many ambivalent and self-critical feelings, shocking, embarrassing, and wooing us in any and every way that may help detach us from our confidence in our assumed values, and inviting us into a space where each of us can, if we are the right kind of person to be affected by any of the foregoing, use feelings and reflections as yet unknown to us to explore whether there might not be

<sup>23</sup> ‘The most basic laws of preservation and growth require... that everyone should invent his *own* virtues, his *own* categorical imperatives’ (A, 11/KSA 6: 177); ‘You haven’t yet discovered yourself or created for yourself an ideal of your very own... We, however, want to *become who we are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves’ (GS, 335/KSA 3: 563); ‘*The total degeneration of humanity*... anyone who has ever thought this possibility through to the end knows one more disgust than other men,—and perhaps a new *task* as well!’ (BGE, 203/KSA 5: 127–8); ‘A reverse attempt would *in itself* be possible—but who is strong enough for it?—to wed to bad conscience the unnatural inclinations’ (GM II: 24/KSA 5: 335).

<sup>24</sup> Brian Leiter argues that what matters is that Nietzsche ‘shake higher types out of their intuitive commitment to the moral traditions of two millennia’ (2002: 155), and that ‘a critique of moral values... requires only that Nietzsche’s writings cause the requisite non-rational and non-conscious responses that lead to a loosening of the conscious allegiance these subjects feel towards morality’ (Leiter 2008). (See also Leiter 2002: 159.)

<sup>25</sup> As I have argued at greater length in Janaway 2007.

other, healthier evaluative attitudes for us to adhere to. Nietzsche seeks to activate dispositions to affective response that manage to coexist in us alongside those fostered by morality: our admiration for heroes and creative geniuses who succeed by being a law unto themselves, our almost imperceptible delight in cruelty, our disgust at having responses that turn out to be slavish, our dismay at our own wish to make others feel guilty, our embarrassment at being overwhelmed by compassion, and our doubts about our squeamishness towards suffering. These reactions, if we have them, intimate that there is more to us than the shape that morality moulds us into: other drives co exist with those that morality nourishes, and can be provoked into action. If we do not have any such responses—and nobody can really predict how any individual will feel in all this—then we will not have been given any reason to change our values. Nietzsche's characteristic mode of persuasion will leave us unmoved. Imagine a reader whose Christian sympathies are provoked or strengthened by reading the *Genealogy*. He or she feels overwhelming compassion and approval for the 'slaves', is appalled, purely and simply, by the prospect of the 'masters' and their so-called morality and feels guilty at the slightest temptation to admire them, warms to the idea of unrequitable guilt before God, is grateful for the image of sinners being punished, recognizes but laughs off the implications in Nietzsche's ironic portrayals of Christians, and so on. Such a person is not persuaded to change, or to want to change his or her values; they see no reason to do so. The harder question is whether *there is a reason* for them to do so. I think it plausible that for Nietzsche, who so often portrays himself as writing to be heard only by the few, there is no reason to change one's values or to want to change them unless one's affective responses approximate to something like those others described above. Only if one is the kind of human being whose internal constitution allows one to have the self-challenging and ambivalent kinds of response Nietzsche calls for is one in a position to understand the nature of moral values and their effects on their psyche in a way that motivates one to look for healthier values, values that are liable, in Nietzsche's view, to take one some step closer to greatness. Chiefly, such individuals might have reason to aspire to an ideal of self-affirmation, to being well-disposed to themselves as a totality. If they did aspire towards that ideal, then instead of having conscious attitudes and goals that are symptoms of, and causes of, weakness, paucity, and disunity in their drives, they might have conscious attitudes and goals that are symptoms of, and a cause of, an increase towards that plenitude of strong, conflicting but synthesized drives that Nietzsche sometimes describes as greatness. The attitude of self-affirmation could be both a result of that greatness and a means towards attaining it.

# Who—or What—Says Yes to Life?

## 1. Introduction

Nietzsche uses the expression ‘saying Yes’ frequently and in many contexts, and this paper aims to examine a range of such uses, in the hope of approaching some picture of what yes-saying might be *per se*, and how it might occur. With regard to the notion of ‘Saying Yes to life’, one can ask both ‘What is Yes-saying?’ and ‘What is life?’ While the former question is my theme here, some brief comments on the latter are in order. I take it as commonly recognized that Nietzsche uses ‘life’ to refer both to the series of events that constitute the life course of *an individual* and to conditions or processes of life *as such*.<sup>1</sup> In the well-known passage on eternal recurrence in *The Gay Science*, the candidate object for affirmation is ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it’ (GS, 341/KSA 3: 570). But in many other places the question whether an individual, class of people, or value system ‘says Yes to life’ cannot be construed in this way. As a succinct characterization of what is at stake for Nietzsche in many of these contexts, the following statement by Nadeem Hussain is useful:

for Nietzsche . . . the fundamental tendency that defines, or at least is essential to, life is a tendency towards expansion, domination, growth, overcoming resistances, increasing strength—in shorthand: power. (Hussain 2011: 152)

So Christian values, allegedly, are negating of life in that they work against expansion, domination, growth, etc. in human individuals and communities. Other values, allegedly, are life-affirming because they foster or augment this kind of tendency. So much I shall take for granted here. My focus, however, will be not on the concept of life, but on the following questions: (1) What can be the subject, and (2) what can be the object, of the attitude (or attitudes) that Nietzsche calls ‘saying Yes’? And (3) And what kind of process or processes may be involved in the occurring or pertaining of a ‘saying Yes’ attitude?

<sup>1</sup> See Richardson 2013: 758–60 for a detailed partition of Nietzsche’s uses of ‘life’.



## 2. 'Saying Yes': Subjects and Objects

I look first at a range of ways in which Nietzsche talks about 'saying Yes', starting with some pure philology. When we talk of affirmation in Nietzsche, we are referring to what he most commonly calls either *Ja sagen* or *bejahen*. *Bejahen* is a transitive verb that always takes a direct object: there is no immediate English equivalent (we have no phrase such as 'to yes' something, or 'to be-yes' it), so we can really only decently translate *bejahen* as 'to affirm'. *Ja sagen* is more straightforwardly 'to say Yes', and typically is followed by *zu*: just as in English we say Yes *to* something—though in Nietzsche's usage, as we shall see, this qualification is sometimes dropped, so that he can talk of saying Yes in a broad sense without specifying a determinate object. All the relevant passages we shall discuss involve parts of the verbs *bejahen* or *Ja sagen*, or some of their cognates, such as *Ja-sager*, *jasagend*, *Bejahung*, *welt-bejahend*, and so on. (Incidentally, just for the record, the Latinate words *Affirmation* and *affirmiren* occur just three times each in the entire *Nachlass*, and nowhere in published writings.)<sup>2</sup>

Among the *objects* at which Yes-saying is directed in Nietzsche's texts, 'life' is especially prominent, but the list also includes, e.g., ignorance, cruelty, morality, decadence, everything forbidden, opposition, war and becoming, the world, another world, one's own existence, oneself, reality, and everything.<sup>3</sup> Quite frequently, though, Nietzsche talks about simply 'saying-Yes' without a specified object: *Daybreak* is a book that just says Yes (EH, 'Daybreak', 1/KSA 6: 330); Zarathustra is 'the most Yes-saying of all spirits' (EH, 'Zarathustra', 6/KSA 6: 343)—it is not explicitly stated to what the book or the character says Yes. There are other uses with unspecified objects: 'some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer' (GS, 276/KSA 3: 521), where the object of affirmation is, grammatically at least, not specified. In another passage, the 'mirror-like soul' of the 'objective man' does not know in general 'how to say Yes or to say No any more'—to anything, it seems (BGE, 207/KSA 5: 136). Again Nietzsche says that the bad conscience brought to light 'a wealth of... affirmation' (GM II: 18/KSA 5: 326)—of what? and by whom, for that matter? In short, human beings, or their systems of value, or their psychological states, can be described as Yes-saying *tout court*, or as No-saying *tout court*, or

<sup>2</sup> In citing published translations below I sometimes replace 'affirm' etc., with the more literal 'say Yes' etc.

<sup>3</sup> For these examples, see BGE, 56, 230/KSA 5: 75, 168; GM I: 13; II: 6; III: 7, 26/KSA 5: 280, 301, 351; EH, 'Birth of Tragedy', 3/KSA 6: 313; EH, 'Daybreak', 1/KSA 6: 330; TI, 'Skirmishes', 49/KSA 6: 152; CW, Epilogue/KSA 6: 52.

alternatively as incapable of any degree of either attitude—the question being, as Nietzsche puts it in a *Nachlass* passage, ‘whether one by nature says Yes or says No or is a peacock’s fan of colourful things’ (KSA, 12: 538, 10 [145]); and in this sort of passage it seems to matter little *what* it is you say Yes or No to: the question is whether you are a Yes-saying or a No-saying *type* as such. This suggests that at least sometimes Nietzsche is thinking of Yes-saying as less of an occurrent act, more of an enduring attitude, disposition, or character-trait.

As regards the *subject* of Yes-saying, it is of human beings or persons that we can literally predicate such an attitude (or its opposite ‘saying No’, *Nein sagen* or *verneinen*). With or without the actual utterance of a *word* such as ‘Yes’ or ‘Ja’, saying Yes would literally embrace acts or attitudes such as agreeing, assenting, approving, accepting, appraising, and so on, all of which are acts or attitudes of persons or human beings. Many of Nietzsche’s usages fall straightforwardly in line with this expectation, simply having as their linguistic subject an expression referring to a human being: ‘I have again learned to say Yes’ (D, 477/KSA 3: 284); ‘I want only to be a Yes-sayer’ (GS, 276/KSA 3: 521); ‘a pessimist [Schopenhauer]... says Yes to morality and plays his flute’ (BGE, 186/KSA 107); Zarathustra is ‘this most Yes-saying [*jasagendster*] of all spirits’ (EH, ‘Zarathustra’, 6/KSA 6: 343). Sometimes the reference is to an indeterminate human being of some type: ‘the fanatic of an ideal... says Yes’ (D, 298/KSA 3: 221); ‘the philosopher... says Yes to *his* existence’ (GM III: 7/KSA 5: 351). Or again the subject can be ‘the human being’ in general: ‘man... did not know how to say Yes to himself’ (GM III: 28/KSA 5: 411). However, a figurative shift occurs when Nietzsche predicates ‘Yes-saying’ of grammatical subjects that are neither human individuals nor types of humans, but rather cultural institutions, cultural products, or sets of values. So, for instance, he finds in Heraclitus’ philosophy (or an ideal philosophy inspired by it) ‘The affirmation [*Bejahung*] of passing away and destruction... saying yes [*das Jasagen*] to opposition and war, *becoming*’ (EH, ‘Birth of Tragedy’, 3/KSA 6: 313); his own *Daybreak*, as we saw, is a ‘Yes-saying book’ (EH, ‘Daybreak’, 1/KSA 6: 330); the ascetic ideal is something that ‘says Yes... solely in accordance with *its* interpretation’ (GM III: 23/KSA 5: 396); ‘the whole of modern historiography... affirms as little as it negates’ (GM III: 26/KSA 5: 406); while ‘the cultural world of Moorish Spain... said Yes to life’ (A, 60/KSA 6: 249). Then there is the central, frequently echoed claim that contrasted systems of value, such as noble morality and Christianity, say Yes and No: ‘Master morality *affirms* just as instinctively as Christian morality *negates*’ (CW, Epilogue/KSA 6: 51). And when Nietzsche calls tragic drama ‘the highest art of saying yes to life’ (EH, ‘Birth of Tragedy’,

4/KSA 6: 313), or 'a formula of the highest *Bejahung*' (EH, 'Birth of Tragedy', 2/KSA 6: 311), no human individual or type is specified as subject.

At other times Nietzschean 'Yes-saying' widens out to such an extent that it leaves behind human individuals, types, and institutions as subject. So sometimes the ostensible subject is the *will to life* that says Yes to life, or to itself (see EH, 'Birth of Tragedy', 3/KSA 6: 312; TI, 'Ancients', 5/KSA 6: 160). 'Will to life' (*Wille zum Leben*) is a central notion of Schopenhauer's, and Nietzsche's choice of this locution reveals something of the motivation behind his pre-occupation with 'Saying Yes'. Book 4 of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* has as its theme *Bejahung und Verneinung des Willens zum Leben*—saying Yes and saying No to the will to life. Schopenhauer advocates saying No as the only route to redemption from life and suffering.<sup>4</sup> And indeed this is a saying No *to itself by itself* on the part of the will to life, since the proper expression for what Schopenhauer values most highly is *Selbstverneinung des Willens zum Leben*—self-negation of the will to life. 'I' as agent do not negate the will to life: it is somehow the agent of its own destruction. We need not pursue the difficulties involved in construing this notion in Schopenhauer. But it is of note that Schopenhauer already conceives of affirmation as an action or attitude adopted by a non-personal agent. Similarly, for Nietzsche the subject of affirmation can be *life* itself: 'an ascending and Yes-saying life [*Jasagenden Leben*]' (EH, 'Destiny', 4/KSA 6: 368); or even 'everything', as in: 'in the whole everything might redeem and say Yes to itself' (TI, 'Skirmishes', 49/KSA 6: 152).

In the cases just mentioned Nietzsche predicates Yes-saying of something broader than a human individual—a creative practice, a system of values, a whole culture, life, everything. But elsewhere the subject is something less than the whole human individual, as when someone's taste (*Geschmack*), conscience (*Gewissen*), soul (*Seele*), or spirit (*Geist*) is described as saying Yes or No: 'my taste is far from saying yes to everything it encounters: it does not like saying yes at all' (TI, 'Ancients', 1/KSA 6: 154); in some societies 'the conscience heartily says "yes!" to cruelty (GM II: 6/KSA 5: 301); we can think of a 'knower... forcing his spirit... to say "no"' when it would like to say 'yes' (BGE, 229/KSA 5: 167); or find that someone's 'mirror-like soul... does not know how to say Yes or to say No any more' (BGE, 207/KSA 5: 136). In *Zarathustra* there is even talk of tongues and stomachs that have learned to say 'Yes' and 'No' (Z, III: 'Of the spirit of gravity', 2/KSA 4: 243). At other times an 'instinct', or 'something in us' says Yes: 'something in us *wants* to live and

<sup>4</sup> See WWR, 1, 424/SW 2: 469.

affirm itself' (GS, 307/KSA 3: 545); or 'our instincts . . . make their decision and say their Yes and No, even *before* the understanding makes an utterance.'<sup>5</sup>

### 3. How Does Affirmation Occur?

So much for the rough catalogue of uses. Now a bit of analysis. It is quite easy to construe the cases where Yes-saying is predicated of institutions and practices as rhetorical tropes in which the attitude in question is really being ascribed to *human beings*—for instance, to those who are part of a culture or adherents of a particular system of values, those who are practitioners of historiography, authors of books, or writers and consumers of tragedy in ancient Greece. The global or unattached Yes-saying we saw in some of the late passages is harder to construe with any precision. However, a reasonable approach might be to read such occurrences of the term as symbolic or expressive of an affirmative psychological outlook that human individuals or human types may instantiate in certain cultural contexts. After all, Nietzsche tells us that the notion of 'Saying yes to life . . . the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility' was important to him as bridge to the *psychology* of the tragic poet (TI, 'Ancients', 5/KSA 6: 160). At the other end of the scale, some cases where Yes-saying is predicated of a conscience, spirit, or such, can be seen as exploiting the part-whole relationship rhetorically in the other direction, using part-for-whole synecdoche: the affirming or negating is grammatically predicated of a part of the person, when the state that is occurring is an affirmation or negation by the human being as such. Saying that my conscience approves something, for instance, is probably just a more interesting way of saying that I approve it.

However, there are some cases where some subpersonal item, rather than the individual human agent, seems to be evoked as the genuine subject of saying Yes or saying No. In such cases some state of the person is to be *explained* by a distinct state, a state in which an *element* of themselves stands in an 'affirming' or 'negating' relation to something. Thus, for example, in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche says 'We negate and have to negate because something in us *wants* to live and affirm itself, something we might not yet know or see!' (GS, 307/KSA 3: 545). Here Nietzsche is describing a psychological process: what happens when someone rejects as an error something they formerly believed in. Such a negation made by the person can be 'proof that there are

<sup>5</sup> KSA 12: 555, note 10 [167]; my translation.

living, driving [*treibende*] forces within us shedding skin' (GS, 307/KSA 3: 545). It seems harder in this case to pronounce that 'Something in me wants to affirm itself' is a mere rhetorical variant of 'I want to affirm myself', because 'Yes-saying' is here not a reflective or even a conscious attitude on the part of a person. What *I* want in this example is to cast off my previous attachments—*my* attitude is a negation. But this attitude is to be explained by the activity of a 'something' that is 'in' me, which is wanting to affirm, to say Yes to, itself.

Nietzsche often attributes a kind of affirming or negating agency to *drives* and *instincts*. This attribution is intended to subvert common psychological explanations made in terms of conscious, reflective attitudes. Thus in a note in the *Nachlass* from 1887 he writes that 'Judgements of beauty and ugliness... appeal to our instincts at the point where they most quickly make their decision and say their Yes and No, even *before* the understanding makes an utterance....'<sup>6</sup> In his diagnosis of the creation of moral values by the slave-revolt he says: 'This kind of human needs the belief in a neutral "subject"... out of an instinct of self-preservation, self-affirmation' (GM I: 13/KSA 5: 280). The human agent's conscious attitude here is not one of affirmation, rather it is a belief in absolute free will; but this consciously held belief is explained by a distinct attitude, namely an *instinct's* saying Yes to the existence of the human agent. This, once again, is a kind of affirmation that must be unavailable to consciousness in order to exert its influence. So it is not the person that says Yes, but rather a subpart of them. Similarly in another (*Nachlass*) passage: 'What really says Yes here [is] first the instinct of those who suffer, then the instinct of the herd, and that third instinct: the instinct of the majority against the exception.'<sup>7</sup> These instincts say Yes to certain (moral, Christian) values, but this affirmative attitude, though it allegedly explains conscious moral judgements, is not mirrored in the explicit content of those judgements as made by the advocates of such values. So in all these cases we seem to be dealing with a process called 'saying Yes' that is at variance with, or unavailable to, an agent's conscious understanding. The 'saying Yes' on the part of the instinct, or the 'something in us', appears to be distinct from, and explanatory of, attitudes that pertain at the level of the human being as agent.

In line with some recent commentators, I treat Nietzsche's terms *Trieb* and *Instinkt*, usually translated as 'drive' and 'instinct', as effectively equivalent in meaning.<sup>8</sup> A drive (or instinct) I take to be, roughly, a relatively enduring disposition of which the agent may be ignorant, but which, even if the agent

<sup>6</sup> KSA 12: 555, note 10 [167]; my translation.

<sup>7</sup> KSA 12: 455, note 10 [3]; my translation.

<sup>8</sup> See Katsafanas 2013b; Katsafanas 2012: 16 n.16; Clark and Dudrick 2012: 169 n.20.

has some awareness of it, operates in a manner outside of the agent's rational or conscious control, and which disposes the agent to perceive, evaluate, feel, think, and behave in certain ways in pursuit of certain ends.<sup>9</sup> Now it is notorious that Nietzsche speaks of drives and instincts in anthropomorphizing vocabulary, as though they were literally agents or selves. If we take such talk literally, then a drive 'says Yes' in more or less the same way that a person or human being assents, approves, or accepts something. But there are serious problems with such a homuncular view of drives, which Paul Katsafanas has summarized succinctly.<sup>10</sup> How would the positing of agents within an agent have any explanatory power for Nietzsche? If he seeks to give a novel explanation of those phenomena that we conventionally interpret in terms of the notions of unitary selfhood and agency, it is hard to see how such an explanation could be given in terms of the very same contested notions, merely shifted to a lower level of description. And secondly, as Katsafanas puts it, 'the homuncular interpretation assumes that we already have a coherent conception of selfhood, and are simply mistaken as to which entities instantiate this concept' (2013b: 731), whereas Nietzsche claims that we do not have a coherent conception of selfhood in the first place.

If we wish to free Nietzsche from the inconsistency of positing selves of a kind he denies, and to preserve the idea that talk of drives can be explanatory of human behaviour, one way to do so is to construe 'The drive says Yes to X' as merely saying 'The drive promotes or facilitates X.' If drives are not really any kind of agent, then their 'affirming X' might amount merely to their functioning in such a way that X tends to occur, or occur more efficiently. So if we think of life as an end for an organism, a drive within that organism (say a reproductive drive or a drive to eat) might 'say Yes to life' just in the sense that it tends to promote life. In this way the Yes-saying disposition or overall character of some human beings could be constituted by the presence in them of a certain drive, or by the 'rank order of drives' that compose them (cf. BGE, 6/KSA 5: 20). Nietzsche tends to make much of those who are Yes-saying 'by nature', or 'instinctively', as though in order to be affirmative in character no reflection or conscious awareness is required: as though one just *is* that way, and one's drives do the work, as it were. Noble morality says Yes 'instinctively' (CW, Epilogue); it is Nietzsche's own 'Dionysian nature' that allegedly cannot separate 'saying Yes' from 'doing No' (*Nein thun nicht vom*

<sup>9</sup> For more sophisticated treatments of drives, see Richardson 1996, Richardson 2004, Anderson 2012, Katsafanas 2013b.

<sup>10</sup> Katsafanas 2013b: 729–31.

*Jasagen zu trennen weiss*, EH, 'Destiny', 2/KSA 6: 366). At BGE, 230/KSA 5: 168 a spirit (*Geist*) that says Yes to ignorance or unknowing is described as resembling a 'digestive force', as if to emphasize that its affirming takes place without intervention from consciousness.

For a parallel, consider Schopenhauer's view that the sex drive (*Geschlechtstrieb*) that exists by nature in all animals is 'the strongest and most decisive affirmation of life' (*die entschiedene, stärkste Bejahung des Lebens*, WWR, 1, 356/SW 2: 389). In Schopenhauer's picture what says Yes to life here is a drive that originates in nature, independently of any influence from culture or learning. This drive is the same in humans as in all creatures that reproduce sexually, even perhaps, in Schopenhauer's view, in the whole of nature.<sup>11</sup> The drive exists 'in us', is disguised from consciousness, but exerts a dominating influence upon it. No conceptualization or conscious reflection is required for this drive to affirm life. As we have seen, some of Nietzsche's utterances seem to give evidence of a parallel view—though, as we shall see, some important qualifications to this reading are required. First, we can distinguish affirmation of this type from a more reflective type of affirmation. Secondly, we shall see that, in Nietzsche's case, not all the subpersonal drives or instincts resemble Schopenhauer's will to life in being hardwired into nature. Some Nietzschean drives and instincts are cultural in origin.

#### 4. Naïve and Reflective Affirmation

The notions of being a Yes-sayer *by nature*, and of saying Yes *instinctively* sound similar to what Ken Gemes has called 'naïve affirmation'. In a discussion of Bernard Reginster's treatment of affirmation (in Reginster 2006), Gemes argues that Reginster's notion of affirmation is 'overly cognitive':

For Reginster affirmation involves various cognitive stances. Thus he says: "To affirm life *in general* is to recognize that those necessary aspects of it "hitherto denied" are "desirable for their own sake" . . . and 'you affirm life if you react with joy to the prospect of its eternal recurrence' . . . [I]t is doubtful that the simple nobles of the first essay of the *Genealogy* took the trouble to take such reflexive stances, yet Nietzsche paints them as paradigms of life affirmation. (Gemes 2008: 462)

<sup>11</sup> The whole of nature manifests will for Schopenhauer, but he also treats 'will' and 'will to life' as interchangeable terms (WWR, 1, 301/SW 2: 324).

So we have one version of affirmation that subsumes it under attitudes such as ‘recognizing that  $x$  is desirable’ or ‘being joyful at the prospect that  $p$ ’: attitudes adopted consciously to conceptualized propositional content, where the content to which the affirmation is directed includes pervasive features of human life (such as its containing suffering). It requires reflective thought to recognize and evaluate these features. Hence the notion that to affirm them is to engage in reflective affirmation. Gemes counters this notion of affirmation with another, ‘naïve affirmation’, as exemplified in the nobles of the *Genealogy*, who appear to ‘affirm life by living it in a direct expressive way’. In light of the latter it can seem as though ‘to affirm life is to give full and complete expression to one’s drives’ (Gemes 2008: 463).<sup>12</sup>

We saw above that Nietzsche often predicates affirmation of subparts of a person, typically drives or instincts. We argued that at least in some cases ‘A subpart of S says Yes’ should not be construed as merely a figurative version of ‘S says Yes’: in these cases S’s attitude is distinct from the subpart’s attitude of saying Yes. We argued also that Nietzsche regards the latter as more fundamental than the former, in the sense that S’s conscious attitudes are explained by the drive or instinct’s saying Yes. The notion of naïve affirmation seems amenable to this structure. Reflective thought, theorizing, even consciousness as such, are in general deprecated by Nietzsche as secondary, superficial phenomena.<sup>13</sup> Beneath the level of reflection, a rank order of drives, never completely known to the agent, is nonetheless ‘who he is’ (BGE, 6/KSA 5: 20; cf. D, 119/KSA 3: 111). A mere reflective affirmation of life in conscious ratiocination and evaluative judgement will thus be of little significance to Nietzsche unless it springs from a more basic healthy configuration of drives that itself is affirmative of life.

## 5. Culturally Acquired Instincts

However, a vital point that has not always been recognized is that Nietzsche’s concern is often with the expression of *culturally acquired* drives and instincts. To grasp this we need a further distinction. Gemes’ distinction is: (1)

<sup>12</sup> Gemes accepts that both these conflicting forms of affirmation are present for Nietzsche, and suggests that the apparent conflict may be capable of resolution: ‘Perhaps . . . Nietzsche’s idea is that for us moderns naïve affirmation is no longer possible and the best we can aim for is reflective affirmation, with the idea that one day, a long time in the future, we may again be capable of naïve affirmation or even a combination of naïve and reflective affirmation’ (Gemes 2008: 463).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., BGE, 3, 6/KSA 5: 17, 19–20; GM II: 16/KSA 5: 322; GS, 354/KSA 3: 590–3.



affirmation as reflective endorsement of life *versus* (2) affirmation as action that is unreflectively expressive of drives. But there is also a distinction within affirmation that is unreflectively expressive of drives, thus: (2a) affirmation as action that is unreflectively expressive of pre-culturally existing drives (as might be found to exist ‘by nature’ in non-human animals, or like the Schopenhauerian sex drive) *versus* (2b) affirmation as action that is unreflectively expressive of culturally acquired drives. The point is that, for Nietzsche, drives and instincts can be both modified and acquired by cultural means. Clark and Dudrick put the point well: ‘there is no reason to think that for Nietzsche all the drives are biologically given or that humans share all their drives with non-human animals’; a drive, they say, can be ‘more like an Aristotelian habit that one has been trained into than a biologically given drive or instinct’ (2012: 168). Nietzsche sometimes says that for certain types of people in certain historical situations, certain characteristics *become instincts*. Some examples of such instincts are ‘knowledge of the privilege of freedom’ or ‘consciousness of freedom’ (GM II: 2/KSA 5: 294), ‘integrity’ (A, 36/KSA 6: 208), or ‘an incapacity for resistance’ (A, 29/KSA 6: 199–200). A drive does not have to be universal to all human beings, and in fact might be peculiar to one individual, as when Nietzsche ascribes to Schopenhauer the ‘drive to be the unriddler of the world’ (GS, 99/KSA 3: 454).<sup>14</sup> Another example occurs in the well-known passage on Goethe in *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche says that Goethe’s instincts were those of the Renaissance: ‘he carried its strongest instincts within himself: sensibility, nature-idolatry, anti-historicism, idealism’ (TI, 49/KSA 6: 151). Even though these instincts are also assigned to a whole historical epoch, they are here characterized as particular to Goethe’s psychological make-up. Furthermore it must be supposed that Goethe acquired such instincts by some fairly complex processes of cultural transmission. An instinct of anti-historicism, whatever exactly it is, is certainly not biologically given or universal within human cultures, or even widespread within a single culture.

Nietzsche is often concerned with drives that are widely shared (by a class or ‘herd’) in some historical context, and he makes clear in *The Gay Science* how something can *become a drive* through acculturation:

That is how education always proceeds: it tries to condition the individual through various attractions and advantages to adopt a way of thinking and

<sup>14</sup> Translating *Trieb* standardly as ‘drive’, rather than ‘urge’ as in the Cambridge translation.

behaving that, when it has become habit, drive and passion, will rule in him and over him *against his ultimate advantage* but 'for the common good'.

(GS, 21/KSA 3: 392)

Hence Nietzsche's aim 'To observe how differently the human drives have grown and still could grow depending on the moral climate' (GS, 7/KSA 3: 379). Christian morality provides an environment that promotes the development and dominance of certain drives, notably those 'instincts of compassion, self-denial, self-sacrifice' targeted in the *Genealogy* (GM, Preface, 5/KSA 5: 252). If we have an instinct of self-denial, it is because a particular historical epoch and its philosophy, literature, religious institutions, schools, everyday informal conventions of behaviour, and so on, have taught us the habit of seeking to place others' benefit before our own, and valuing those agents who do so. This is how it has *become* an instinct, or *become* a drive, a ruling drive, for us in particular.

Some actions that we regard as morally good can be classed as unreflective, such as diving into a canal to save a drowning stranger or wrestling a mugger to the ground 'without thinking', as is commonly said. It is intelligible to describe behaviour of this kind as manifesting a culturally acquired instinct to act, in virtue of which the agent recognizes that some outcomes ought to be prevented and some promoted. But acquired instincts may also be invoked in cases where reflection does occur. Faced with a complicated situation, say, whether to give up my job and devote myself to delivering humanitarian aid in Africa, I may engage in protracted reflection on what matters (all things considered), what value different human lives have, what the consequences will be for me, for future generations, and so on. Yet, if I decided on the humanitarian option as a result of such deliberation, it could nonetheless be a case of what Nietzsche would call acting out of an 'instinct of compassion', or even an 'instinct of self-sacrifice'. This would mean not that I failed to act on rational grounds, failed to deliberate or make conscious reference to value-principles, but rather that which thoughts of mine were salient, which actions and feelings presented themselves to me as positive and negative in value, and what ultimately moved me in one direction rather than another, was not under my conscious control, but sprang from a persistent underlying habit or disposition, a ruling drive that is not itself chosen reflectively, but has become part of my character. As Nietzsche might put it, my decision (however reflectively arrived at) might stem from an instinct or drive's 'saying Yes'. I would have acquired this drive or instinct through education, and it would function in me to facilitate or enhance 'the common good' at the expense of

my own interests, or to eliminate as much suffering as possible. In Nietzsche's view, the presence of such instincts of compassion and self-sacrifice would provide an explanation of my reflective thought and behaviour.

## 6. Inside and Outside

Nietzsche is concerned, then, both with the ways in which action, feeling, and reflective thought express someone's drives, and with the ways in which a culture builds some of those drives. Recalling our earlier observation that Nietzsche also finds it natural to speak of 'Yes-saying' on the part of historical periods, cultures, and art forms, I want to put forward a hypothesis that borrows from an analysis of Plato's psychology in the *Republic* given by Jonathan Lear. The comparison can, I think, be initially motivated by reminding ourselves of Nietzsche's plea to preserve an ancient conception of the soul (he insists on retaining that term) and to treat the soul as a 'subject-multiplicity' and as 'a society constructed out of drives and affects' (BGE, 12/KSA 5: 27). Nietzsche may well mean by this the composite soul of the *Republic*, as Clark and Dudrick confidently propose (2012: 163).<sup>15</sup> It should not be too surprising if Nietzsche the erstwhile Plato scholar incorporates various features found in the *Republic* into his understanding of the psyche—particularly in view of a tradition of Plato scholarship which reads *all* the elements of the soul in the *Republic* as drives, and holds that for Plato the healthiest and noblest soul is that in which the drive to discover truth rules the other drives.<sup>16</sup>

However, without going into any detail concerning the many possible affinities and contrasts between the Platonic and Nietzschean pictures of the psyche,<sup>17</sup> let us isolate one feature discerned by Lear in an influential article first published in 1992. Lear argues that the parallel Plato draws between the internal structure of the individual psyche and that of the polis at large is not

<sup>15</sup> For a critique of the specifics of Clark and Dudrick's account, see Janaway 2014a.

<sup>16</sup> Ferrari (2007: 165) nominates the Platonic soul-elements (as they figure in the extended discussion of *Republic* Books 8 and 9) as 'the drive toward material satisfaction', 'the drive to win and amount to something', and 'the drive to uncover truth'. This 'drive' talk has a fairly strong tradition among Plato commentators. See Cornford 1929–30: 219; Robinson 1995: 56; Kahn 1987: 83; Klosko 1986: 71; Cooper 2001: 94–5.

<sup>17</sup> Some comparisons of the Platonic and Nietzschean accounts are Katsafanas 2011; Nehamas 1985: 182; Parkes 1994: 221–31, 253, 292; Richardson 1996: 126–9; Clark and Dudrick 2006: 149; Thiele 1990: 51–2; May 1999: 87.

the lame analogy it has sometimes been called, but rather reflects a deep commitment on Plato's part to a 'dynamic account of the psychological transactions between inside and outside a person's psyche, between a person's inner life and his cultural environment' (Lear 2001: 169). Thus:

We 'feed' our psyches by internalizing cultural influences. . . . The fact that we are so dependent on internalization for our psychological constitution, makes us susceptible to cultural luck. Our ultimate dependency is manifest in the fact that we internalize these influences before we can understand their significance. . . . [T]he polis is formed by a process of externalization of structures within the psyches of those who shape it. . . . After we internalize our cultural roles by a process of education, we then externalize them in our social roles. . . . Psyche and polis are mutually constituted by a series of internalizations and externalizations, with transformations occurring on both sides of the border. (Lear 2001: 173–6)

So, in short, what kinds of drives gain mastery within an individual is a function of what kinds of values and behaviour are salient in that individual's environment; but at the same time the environment is constructed by individuals expressing their internal configurations of drives.

Now my hypothesis about Nietzsche: that he tacitly adopts a similar view to this concerning cultural values and the drives of individuals. The ethical systems and other cultural practices in which an individual is educated play a substantial role in forming his or her internal drives, and shaping how they relate to one another. And at the same time it is because its constituent individuals are themselves internally constituted by certain rank orders of drives that a wider culture and its values are perpetuated. Something like this bi-directional influence of drives upon culture and culture upon drives must be present, since otherwise it is hard to explain how Nietzsche can treat the cultural phenomenon, morality, simultaneously as both a symptom and a danger (GM, Preface, 6/KSA 253). We may say that morality, in Nietzsche's view, is both an externalization of instincts and drives, and a way in which instincts and drives are educated.<sup>18</sup> This picture of 'mutual constitution by a series of internalizations and externalizations' makes intelligible the fluidity with which Nietzsche moves between the different subjects of 'saying Yes'. To

<sup>18</sup> See Janaway 2012b (now Chapter 13 of this volume).

put it crudely, a whole culture says Yes because the drives within individuals say Yes, and these drives say Yes because they are cultivated in a Yes-saying environment.

## 7. 'Ach!'

What about Nietzsche's own affirmation of life? In 1882 he wrote the following words, which seem to constitute a poignant confession:

I do not want life *again*. How have I borne it? By creating. What makes me tolerate the sight? The vision of the *Übermensch*, who says yes to life [*das Leben bejaht*]. I have tried to say yes to it *myself*—Ach!.

(KSA 10: 137, my translation)

Nietzsche here confesses that he has not achieved the affirmation of which the *Übermensch* would be capable. The *Übermensch* is of course an ideal rather than a reality, and moreover an ideal within a fiction. That is to say, the hitherto uninstantiated type *Übermensch* is the conception of the eponymous character Zarathustra in Nietzsche's book. And it looks—unsurprisingly—as though the human being Nietzsche has not achieved the Yes-saying characteristic of his fictional character's ideal type of being, an ideal that may perhaps be so demanding as not to be realizable.<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche strains towards an extreme. Zarathustra is described as 'the *most* affirmative' or 'the *most* yes-saying', of all spirits (EH, 'Zarathustra', 6/KSA 6: 343). The ideal is to be the *most* world-affirming human being (BGE, 56/KSA 5: 75). The challenge of so being (in response to the thought of eternal recurrence, that '*highest* possible formula of affirmation', EH, 'Zarathustra', 1/KSA 6: 335) is 'the *heaviest* weight' (GS, 341/KSA 3: 570). Always superlatives for this imagined state; meanwhile, in the above note at any rate,<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche the human being falls somewhere short of affirming life at all, even to the extent of wanting it *one* more time.

Why does Nietzsche fall short? Is it just that he suffered pains and misfortunes to a degree that his internal psychic structure could not tolerate? Or can we give a broader explanation for the fact that he can only say 'Ach!' when he aspires to the highest extreme of Yes-saying? Here is a suggestion that builds

<sup>19</sup> My discussion here is influenced by Loeb 2005: 74.

<sup>20</sup> A similar shortcoming is expressed at EH, 'Why I Am So Wise', 3/KSA 6: 268.

on the discussion of affirmation above. It is immensely difficult, if not impossible, to develop one's own drives without the aid of a culture from which they can be internalized. Though individuals may have unique configurations of drives, the drives will never be subject to their full knowledge or control, and they will be at the mercy of what they have internalized from their external value-environment. Nietzsche's character was highly complex, and so was his cultural environment. In such circumstances there will be struggle and conflict, such as that sharp juxtaposition of master morality and slave morality which he tells us can pertain 'inside the same person even, within a single soul' (BGE, 260/KSA 5: 208). In what Nietzsche thinks of as a Yes-saying culture (such as his own is not) an individual would be able to acquire, from the values that surround him or her, a correspondingly robust and affirmative configuration of instincts or drives. Being driven from within by something that says Yes, the individual would express that drive in action, thus helping to constitute the very cultural milieu that would in turn form Yes-saying drives in individuals. But the pathos of Nietzsche is that, because of the culture in which he finds himself externally, he cannot become so constituted internally as a fully Yes-saying being. Much as Plato could only construct some characters who fictionally found not an ideal city, but just a 'city of words' (*Republic* 592a); so Nietzsche is limited to constructing an ideal Yes-sayer in words, rather than being one in reality.

## 8. Conclusion

We began by exploring Nietzsche's uses of the expressions *Ja-sagen* and *bejahen*. We discovered that he makes a wide range of different objects the target of such affirmative attitudes. Nietzsche's priority is to show the possibility and desirability of affirming *life*, but he also has a tendency to valorize 'being a Yes-sayer' as such, and to see the degree to which one is capable of Yes-saying as a measure of one's proximity to an ideal. We considered how, in Nietzsche's view, Yes-saying or affirmation is supposed to occur. One might expect that 'saying Yes' would literally be something that only human agents can do. But Nietzsche's linguistic usage frequently predicates Yes-saying of subjects that are not human agents, and does so in two different directions. First, cultural products such as books, genres of art, philosophical systems, sets of values, societies, and historical epochs can 'say Yes'. Second, the same applies to elements within an agent, such as a conscience, drive, instinct, or simply 'something in us'. Many of these uses can be interpreted

unproblematically as figurative ways of attributing an affirmative attitude to one or more human agents. However, I have argued that Nietzsche also frequently attributes Yes-saying non-figuratively to genuine subpersonal elements, such as a drive or instinct, where the activity of Yes-saying cannot be re-expressed as the agent's conscious act of approval, and is regarded as explaining distinct attitudes that occur at the conscious level. These cases give purchase to the notion of naïve or unreflective affirmation, which for Nietzsche fundamentally involves a healthy configuration of drives or instincts.

However, we also presented evidence that for Nietzsche not all drives and instincts are universal to the human species, and more specifically not all are rooted in biology. There are culturally acquired drives and instincts. I suggested that Nietzsche implicitly works with a reciprocal 'inside-outside' model, in which the drives of individual agents are influenced by wider cultural practices such as 'moralities', and those cultural practices are themselves sustained by agents' behaviour that can be explained through the operation of internal drives and instincts. This picture makes it quite natural for Nietzsche to describe agents, and their inner drives, and their wider cultures as 'Saying Yes', or as failing to do so. It also suggests why Nietzsche himself must fall short of the highest ideal of life affirmation: his internal constitution had not been shaped by what he would regard as a life-affirming culture. Only an individual radically isolated from nineteenth-century European culture could build the required degree of health among their drives to become the 'most Yes-saying' of all spirits. Hence only in fiction could there be that individual.

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